

At what cost?

This is with reference to the January/February 2008 issue of *Engineering Dimensions*, particularly an article entitled “Location, location, location” (p. 12), the President’s Message (p. 3) and the In Council update on the new PEO headquarters (p. 48).

In your article you state that the new building ought to provide “a business centre for the use of members and applicants.” President Bilanski, P.Eng., in his piece, calls for “facilities...for members to use.” These statements represent a very GTA-centric approach. How many PEO members are outside the GTA and will not have easy access to the planned new building? Some years ago, PEO elected officials—including the President—travelled to Ontario chapter meetings outside the GTA. Now that was true membership outreach, perhaps the kind President Bilanski envisions. This initiative appears to have evaporated. Engineers outside the GTA are still second-class citizens—a situation that has existed since I joined PEO in 1976. In addition, your article mentions “opportunities to reach out to students at two of the three engineering schools in *Toronto*” (emphasis mine). Is there anywhere else in the province of Ontario that exists?

Under the subheading “At what cost?” you say that PEO membership will be asked to vote on a whopping 10 per cent increase to fees (up \$20 from \$200). This is substantially more than the cost of living, substantially more than most engineering salary increases, and is another indicator that PEO Council is asleep at the switch! Why wasn’t PEO membership made aware of this proposed increase, and the reasons for it, well in advance of election time? I expect the buildings President Bilanski so admired in the UK—one in Ireland and two in Britain—were not purchased recently and therefore have de facto location at no extra cost.

Also somewhat bothersome is the fact that normally the editor of publications that I am familiar with is non-partisan and objective. By writing the article “Loca-

tion, location, location” and making the subjective statement in your Editor’s Note of “Is it worth \$20 to you to get a building that garners the respect the profession deserves?” you have shown yourself to be, first and foremost, an instrument of PEO Council—a Council that is woefully out of touch with its membership as they have shown by their required building features as reported in the In Council update. This is not fitting for a professional journalist of any publication.

Notwithstanding the *Professional Engineers Act*, my vote for a new PEO headquarters is to locate in downtown Thunder Bay and post a permanent Government Liaison Program person in Toronto.

*M. Rosplesch, P.Eng.,
Ottawa, ON*

No edifice needed

I am perturbed by several comments in the January/February 2008 issue attributed to President Bilanski, P.Eng. (“The international picture,” p. 3). The first, regarding a five-year master’s degree as a minimum requirement for registration, puzzles me. I have spent the last 48 years in engineering and consulting to the manufacturing sector, where the vast majority of P.Eng.s apply their skills in the trenches. It may surprise Dr. Bilanski that most operate at the technologist level in the day-to-day world and rarely use their full technical skills. This is also true in the process industry, construction sites and certainly in the government sector.

His disdain for technologists is apparent when he says that “engineers in Ontario are now only a step above technologists.” I have seen several situations where technologists, due to their practical skills and experience, have saved the skins of so-called professional engineers. In view of my experience over a long period of time, I would suggest that more engineering schools like the University of Waterloo with their “sandwich courses” would fit the bill more appropriately.

The final concern is about Dr. Bilanski’s need for a downtown Toronto head

office, after visiting Ireland and the UK engineering associations. Methinks he has been charmed by the medieval thinking of the Brits who, as we know (I’m an ex-Brit), love prestige, class distinction and pomposity. Surely, there’s no need for that here. If the bylaw states that PEO must be in Toronto, then it would be much cheaper to change the bylaw. With current modern communications technology, it doesn’t matter where PEO is located. If there’s a need to be near government, what better place than Ottawa?

Since the majority of engineers live outside Toronto and, I suspect, would prefer not to have to fight their way into this metropolis, I think the elevated cost of buying or building in this high cost, heavily taxed location, is not practical or cost effective.

I suspect we don’t need an edifice to increase our profile. This is best accomplished by being professional in the basic sense of the term—honest, hard working and providing quality service to clients and the public at large. What else is there?

Let’s be honest with ourselves, except for the boffins in our profession, who do excellent work and often high profile R&D, how many average Canadians ever think of us as a group of professionals, and does that lessen our impact on society?

*George Hayhurst, P.Eng.,
Oakville, ON*

Ed note: Just to clarify, about 55 per cent of the professional engineers who live in Ontario reside in the West Central and East Central regions (the GTA). More than 10,000 members live outside Ontario. Also, the requirement that PEO’s offices be within Toronto is not part of the bylaw but is section 2(2) of the Professional Engineers Act.

Promote co-op, not master’s

I was quite disturbed with Dr. Bilanski’s President’s Message in the January/February 2008 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (“The international picture,” p. 3). To state in such a forum as ours that “Engineers in Ontario are now only a step above technologists” is demeaning to a professional

engineer such as me. To state that he concedes a “master’s degree as a minimum requirement for professional registration/certification” will do nothing to further a profession struggling to attract students. Moreover, I sincerely question the usefulness of a master’s degree with adequate undergraduate training.

I have spent the past 35 years working as a professional engineer for Canadian engineering companies on six continents. During that time I have had the pleasure of meeting and associating with graduates from most major international engineering schools. I can assure Dr. Bilanski that Canadian engineers generally, and Ontario graduates specifically, are equal to or better than any with whom I have worked. That said, graduates from cooperative engineering programs, such as those offered by the University of Waterloo, stand out well above their peers and are recognized as leaders.

Dr. Bilanski should focus his efforts on how to better hone the current undergraduate programs in place in Ontario by promoting a more practical approach to engineering, such as mandating cooperative education for all engineering graduates. As our elected representative, it is his duty to encourage the profession by promoting our strengths in international forums.

*Wayne Boyd, P.Eng.,
Woodbridge, ON*

Comparing us to the UK

I read with interest the President’s Message (p. 3) and the Editor’s Note (p. 6) in the January/February 2008 issue of *Engineering Dimensions*.

I agree with the idea of raising the minimum academic qualification for the P.Eng. to the master’s degree level, consistent with the standards in Washington. I also feel that the current engineering degree syllabus in Canadian universities needs to be upgraded to bring it in line with those in other countries. PEO should take the lead in this respect and ensure that engineers learn more about applicable engineering subjects rather than math and computers.

However, I am not in favour of higher P.Eng. membership fees in view of the existing services rendered by PEO. Consider the membership fee for professional

engineers in the UK (IMechE). They get a professional engineering magazine twice a month. This is an excellent magazine full of the latest technical articles in various fields of engineering and several pages of employment advertisements. In addition, there are educational seminars held under various IMechE subcommittees throughout the year. On the other hand, *Engineering Dimensions* (issued bimonthly) mainly deals with regulatory issues with little or no technical content. I hope PEO would consider providing similar services to those in the UK.

Thus, IMechE and PEO differ in their missions and the type of services provided. Dr. Bilanski’s comparison of the two buildings should be justifiable in terms of services provided. In my opinion, the current rented accommodation is adequate for housing the PEO staff involved in providing the services and is justifiable for economic operation of PEO.

*Ashok N. Kumar, P.Eng.,
Georgetown, ON*

Spending our money wisely

Dr. Bilanski’s letter “Go Big or Go Home,” enclosed with the election mailing, generally represents a realistic and forward-looking point of view.

However, I doubt the wisdom of spending an extra \$10 million to have a so-called “power” location to “showcase” our profession. Certainly we seek the esteem of the public. But we’ll have to earn it. We won’t get it by throwing millions into some monument to our own vanity that the great majority of the public, and most of our members, will never see.

Accessibility to those who must go to the facility on a regular basis is, of course, necessary. In this connection, of the 16 candidates for election to Council, two are from Toronto, a further four from the GTA, and the rest from elsewhere—not a strong argument in favour of downtown Toronto. The “centre of mass” might be Mississauga or Oakville.

I, therefore, suggest that we concentrate on the real and attainable goals cited by Dr. Bilanski. The extra \$10 million can doubtless be put to good use in pursuing these.

*Robert M. Thomas, P.Eng.,
Godfrey, ON*

The politics behind the debate

David Moffat’s letter in the January/February issue on “global warming” (*Engineering Dimensions*, p. 10) reveals the level of religious orthodoxy that supporters of the current global warming hysteria have achieved, if only by his use of the phrase “denying global warming.” By ridiculing those who hold opposing views and discrediting (or even hiding) evidence to the contrary, they are hoping to win the argument by bluster rather than with facts. Hopefully, their embarrassment is not too deep when it becomes clear that this has not been a scientific debate, but a political one, and they have been misled.

In the sloppy use of the term “global warming,” we need, as engineers, to be clear what is meant. Most who have studied this matter would accept as reasonable that temperatures, on average, increased up to 1940, then cooled from 1940 to about 1975 (in spite of massive air emissions in wartime activity), then increased again until the present. Many scientists believe the sun is almost entirely responsible for this, due to its well-known variations in radiation, and some believe that temperatures are poised to decrease again as part of this natural cycle. But that is no longer what is meant by global warming. It’s now a code word for something more directly political. In his questions, Mr. Moffat should separate the scientific forecasts from the political agenda.

The problem is that environmental, political, anti-petroleum industry and similar groups have grabbed a unique opportunity for credibility by convincing people that carbon dioxide produced by human activity is responsible for climate changes, and that developed countries must completely disrupt their economies and lifestyles to meet some arbitrary goal. Reporters looking for a “disaster” story have jumped on board. As if the changes would actually make any difference, and even some global warming enthusiasts admit that draconian measures will only have an impact of around one degree in Canada. The truth is that carbon dioxide is essential to plant life, and therefore to humans, while it makes up a very small percentage of

greenhouse gases. The majority of people have neither the time nor training to evaluate the current campaign for what it is, and cannot be blamed for being deluded.

The global warming delusion is founded on some strong “scientific” premises. Two have already been completely discredited, and have been quietly dropped. The famous hockey stick, appar-

ently showing a rapid increase in temperatures in recent industrialized decades, turned out to be based on selected data to support the politics, and I understand even the IPCC has dropped this from its material. More recently, I understand that studies claiming that the 1990s were the warmest on record had significant errors and the work was quietly corrected to show now that, in fact, the 1930s were

the warmest. I may have missed it but maybe others saw the press conference announcement of this mistake. Gore and his like insist “the science is settled.” Maybe we should get it right first.

*Archie Bennett, P.Eng.,
Oakville, ON*

A severe impact

David Moffat, P.Eng., poses the question, “If global warming is true and we do not take action following Tysoe’s lead, will the world come to an end as we know it?” (*Engineering Dimensions*, January/February 2008, p. 10). The implication is that no matter whether anthropomorphic-generated climate change is true or bogus, we must, on faith, embrace it as truth. Doubt is apostasy. “Chicken Little” Al Gore foretells that our present lifestyle inevitably will lead to global catastrophe. Thus, Gore joins the vast panoply of prophets of Armageddon stretching back to the beginning of civilization.

Even the proponents of climate change acknowledge that implementation of Kyoto will have negligible effect on climate change. So we sign on as a “grand gesture” to show that we are good world citizens. We want all the world to know that, as a first world country, we are first in line to flagellate ourselves in atonement for being successful, rich and comfortable. But what will be the consequences for Canada if we plunge headlong into gutting our economy while other major carbon emitters ignore Kyoto? It might not end David Moffat’s world as he knows it, but other Canadians will be severely impacted.

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