

## PUBLIC POLICY ROUNDUP

By Donald Wallace

EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS have created an incredible whirlwind at the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy (OCEPP). Activities at the national, provincial and local levels are presenting enormous opportunities for engineers to become more engaged in public policy issues.

The 2009 federal budget pledges nearly \$12 billion over three years for roads, bridges, broadband Internet access and other infrastructure work, while Ontario's 2009 budget earmarks \$32.5 billion over two years for such infrastructure projects as road and hospital improvements. The Ontario government has also introduced the sweeping *Green Energy Act*. Not only will engineers play a leading role in the design and implementation of infrastructure and clean-tech initiatives, they also have a pressing responsibility to ensure these huge sums of money are spent in a sound and sensible way.

The centre's inaugural Policy Engagement Series event on March 24 at Queen's Park was an unqualified success. Almost 60 attendees, including MPPs, university faculty members, senior government officials and graduate students listened attentively to keynote speaker Chris Kennedy, PhD, P.Eng., address the topic of "smart ways to spend infrastructure dollars." This presentation was oversubscribed and Kennedy will be speaking at Queen's Park again in May.

Many other activities and events have kept the centre busy. In February, I engaged PEO council in a planning exercise to narrow down the centre's key policy rubrics. These areas are summarized in the figure at right.

In late March, I participated in TVOntario's AgendaCamp in Waterloo, a fascinating community-building exercise looking at the province's innovation economy. The end of the month also marked the deadline for the centre's first student essay competition. The winner(s) will be invited to present their papers at the centre's inaugural annual public policy conference in Toronto on May 8.

By the time you read this, we will have held that conference, organized around the theme of "Ontario's innovation agenda." It will have brought together engineers, legislators, policy-makers and university students from across the province keenly interested in discussing and posing solutions to serious public policy issues, such as maintaining adequate supplies of clean water and electricity. Featured speakers

included Ontario Research and Innovation Minister John Wilkinson, Amit Chakma, PhD, the incoming president of the University of Western Ontario, and Carolyn Bennett, MD, former federal minister of state for public health.

The voice of engineers is being heard through vehicles such as OCEPP's new flagship publication, *The Journal of Policy Engagement*. The second issue can be found in the centre of this magazine. The first two issues feature articles by 15 contributors on topics as diverse as global engineering, a new national framework for engineering membership and licensing, and how engineers can promote greater use of a device that helps stroke and spinal cord patients regain the use of their limbs.

There can be no doubt the centre has succeeded in attracting the attention of policy-makers and opinion leaders, and we will continue to seek creative and constructive ways to improve the access of engineers to policy discussions of consequence.  $\Sigma$

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