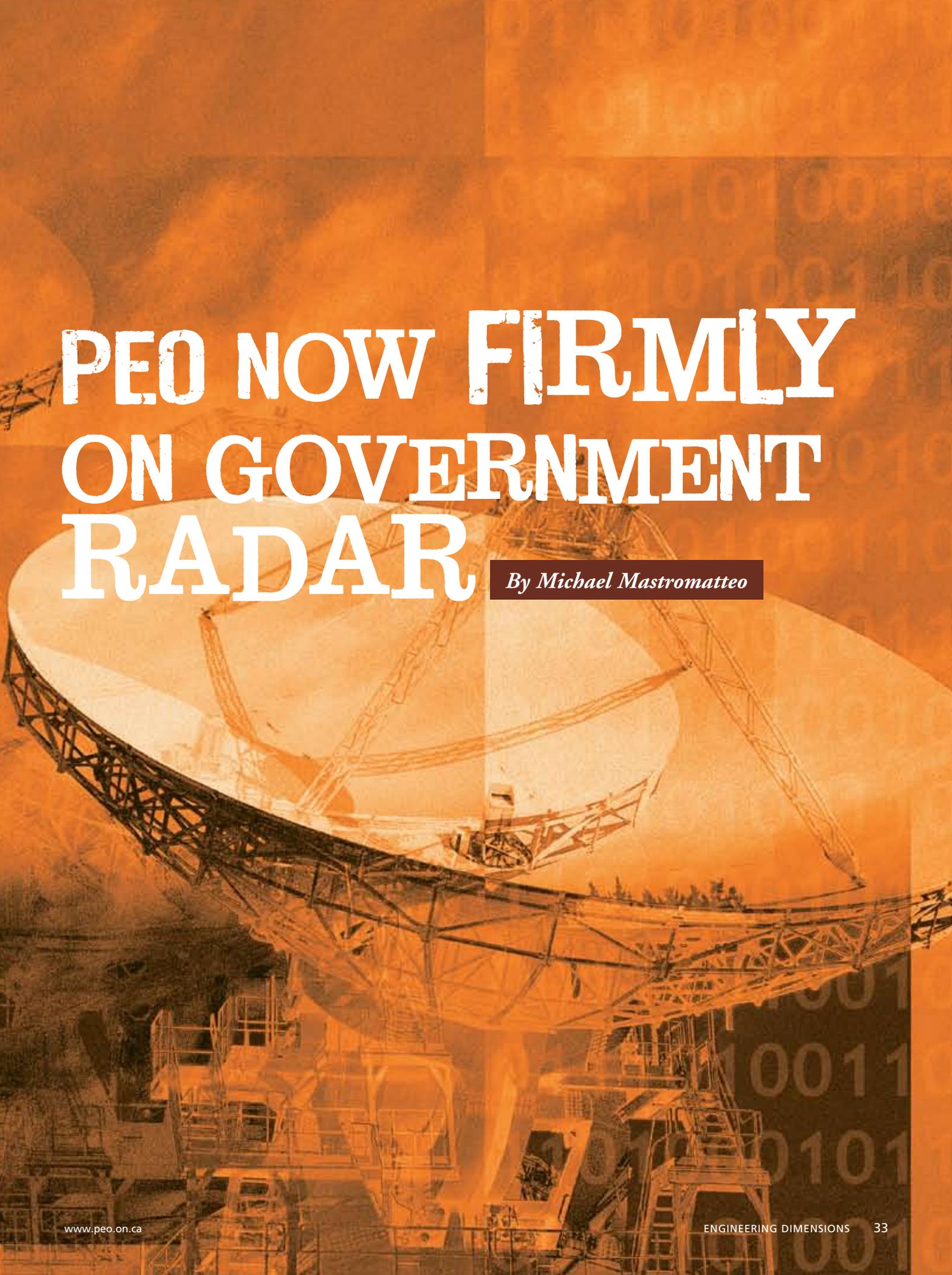
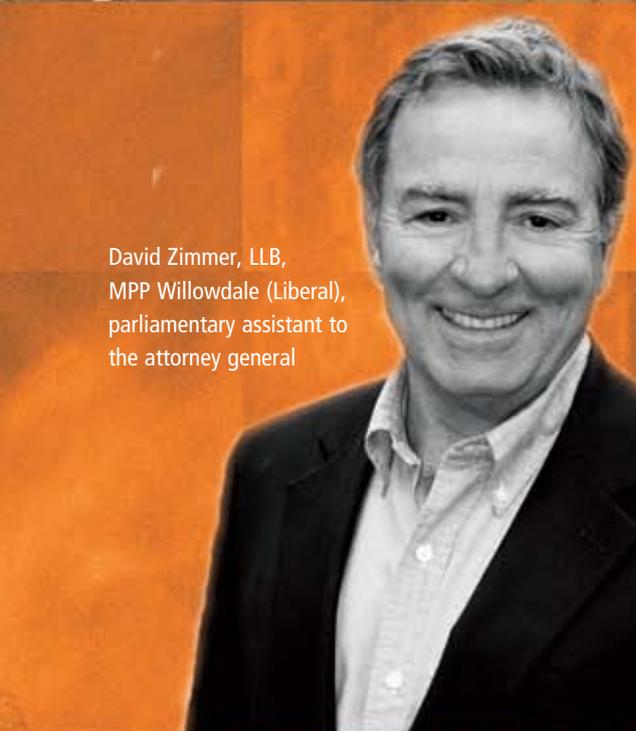


**PEO has made great strides in government outreach and relationship building since being told it lacked a presence on the province's radar. The effort bodes well for PEO's vision of becoming the global leader in professional self-regulation.**

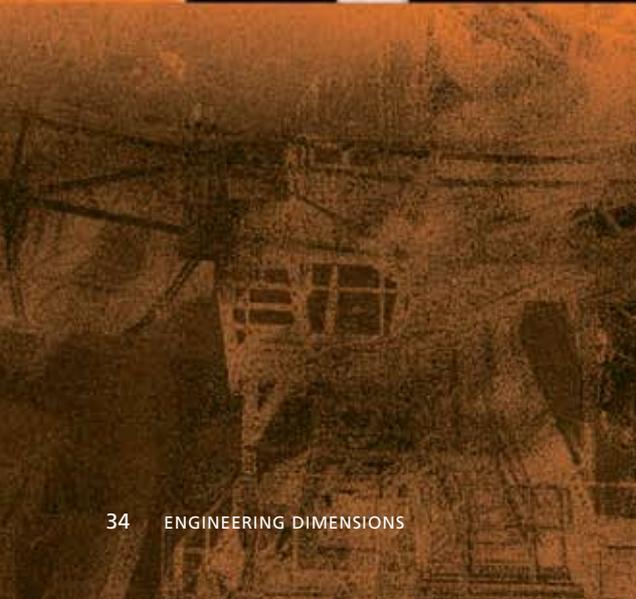
The background of the entire page is a monochromatic orange. It features a large, detailed image of a satellite dish antenna structure, which is a complex lattice of metal beams. The dish is oriented towards the upper left. In the background, there are faint, semi-transparent binary digits (0s and 1s) scattered across the scene, particularly on the right side. The main title is written in a large, white, distressed, serif font, with the words stacked vertically. The author's name is in a smaller, white, italicized serif font, set within a dark rectangular box.

# PEO NOW FIRMLY ON GOVERNMENT RADAR

*By Michael Mastromatteo*



David Zimmer, LLB,  
MPP Willowdale (Liberal),  
parliamentary assistant to  
the attorney general



One of the hard lessons won from PEO's legal challenge of the housing ministry's building code knowledge testing and registration regime, was the need for the engineering regulator to pay heed to its relationship with the provincial government.

Although PEO was successful in the judicial review that upheld the jurisdiction of the *Professional Engineers Act* over the necessary qualifications for professional engineers to do professional engineering, the case indicated something of a disconnect between PEO and the provincial government. There was a sense that PEO hadn't recognized a looming threat and didn't have proper relationships in place within government to derail a potentially harmful and precedent-setting government initiative.

But despite the awkwardness of an engineering regulator whose existence is derived from provincial legislation applying for a judicial review of a provincial government's jurisdiction, the case taught PEO that it had to become more proactive in its relationship with its government overseers to offset future legislative initiatives that might be at odds with engineering self-regulation.

PEO came to realize that positive government relations can't be taken for granted and, in fact, must be continually nurtured for the greater good of the engineering profession and the general public.

The provincial government, meanwhile, learned PEO was "out there" and that the "quiet profession" was ready to make noise when necessary.

The incident also inspired PEO to engage its then 70,000 members in helping government understand the value of a self-regulated engineering profession by putting the talents and expertise of those members at the government's disposal when the government was considering public policy of a technical nature.

David Zimmer, LLB, MPP Willowdale (Liberal), has enjoyed a unique vantage point in the new prominence of Ontario engineering. As parliamentary assistant to the Ontario attorney general, the minister responsible for the *Professional Engineers Act*, Zimmer has since 2003 held the engineering file at Queen's Park.

In a recent sit-down with *Engineering Dimensions*, Zimmer reflected on PEO's profile and its efforts since the building code dispute to achieve more harmonious government relations.

Zimmer recalled that shortly after the Ontario Liberals were elected in 2003, he was invited to address a meeting of PEO's Willowdale-Thornhill Chapter. It was at that meeting Zimmer first spoke of PEO not even showing up on the government's radar screen. It's a metaphor he's been using repeatedly in presentations to chapters and other engineering audiences over the last eight years.

#### QUIET PROFESSION

"In the meeting with the Willowdale Chapter, I wanted to talk about where engineering would fit into the new Ontario government's plan," Zimmer says. "I made the observation that PEO and engineering was the quiet profession in Ontario. I had heard loudly from the lawyers, and I heard from the accountants and the architects, but I had heard nothing from the engineers."

Zimmer said the election of a new government in Ontario then presented the engineering profession with an opportunity to make its voice heard on a number of important issues. “There was talk about renewal of the province’s economy and renewal of the province’s governance structure and other issues that engineers should be involved in, but it was my sense that they weren’t,” Zimmer adds.

Backed by former attorney general Michael Bryant, LLB, and now by current Attorney General Chris Bentley, LLB, Zimmer maintained the onus was on engineers to bring their concerns forward to government. It was a concept expanded on by federal member of parliament Bob Rae (Liberal, Toronto Centre), who at the PEO annual general meeting in 2007 told engineers that if they weren’t prepared to make their case to government, no one else would.

Zimmer suggests an important element of PEO’s success in raising its profile in recent years was the regulator’s steady work in overcoming perceived barriers to licensing and registration for internationally educated engineering professionals and new Canadians.

“PEO was really quick off the mark in a thoughtful way in working with new Canadians,” Zimmer says, “and in many ways their model served as a model to the other professions on how to break down these admission barriers.”

Furthermore, Zimmer suggests, PEO’s help in the credential recognition issue encouraged the province to look to the regulator for expertise and advice in other policy matters. “They [PEO and professional engineers] showed real leadership, and the leadership they showed on the [credential recognition] issue had a real effect in government because PEO built up a lot of goodwill here. As well, there was a sense within government that these people really are interested in the public interest and so, with that good experience, the government now goes back to them. We’ve gone back to PEO on the energy file and other things, and we’ve said, ‘Put us in touch with the people who do energy work. Help us.’”

Zimmer also says PEO’s decision to establish the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy (OCEPP) in 2008 was a high water mark for the regulator’s outreach activity. OCEPP organizes quarterly policy engagement seminars at which engineers, educators, political leaders and others offer insights on different aspects of engineering and public policy.

But in keeping with its regulator’s mandate, PEO’s outreach to government has also been non-partisan.

## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton (Conservative), has since July 2009 been the critic to the attorney general in the opposition “shadow cabinet.”

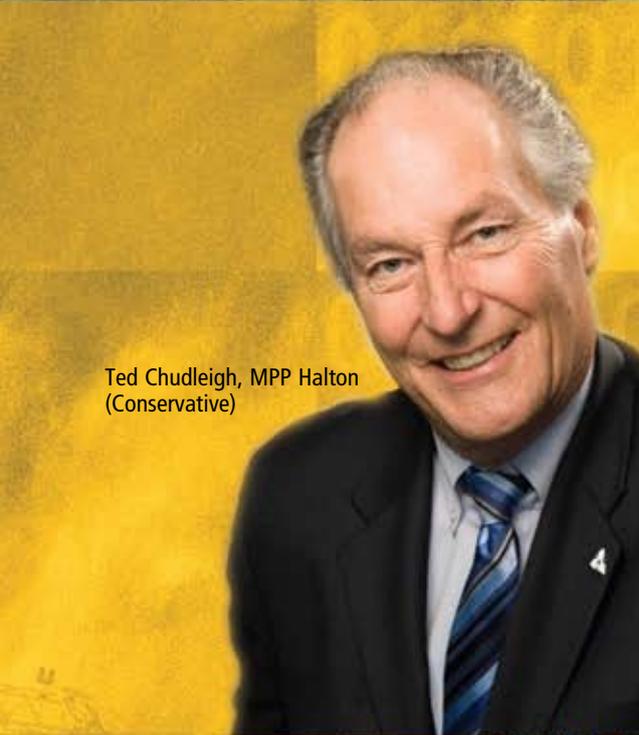
In a March 22 interview with *Engineering Dimensions*, Chudleigh said that in his experience at PEO’s chapter level, the regulator has always been proactive in bringing its concerns forward.

“I’ve never had an issue with the engineers’ profile or have wondered about it,” he said. “I can get in touch with them if I need to. It’s not hard today to find out about an association. It’s easy to have them in your rolodex, one way or another, but the engineers are there.”

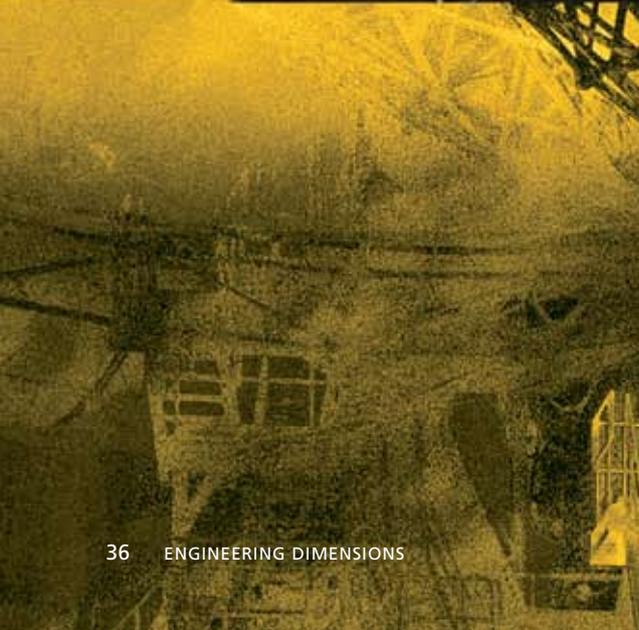
Last October, Chudleigh addressed an Oakville Chapter licence certificate presentation ceremony at which he stressed the role of committed engineers and scientists in creating new opportunities in a changing global economy.

First elected to the Ontario legislature in 1995, Chudleigh has enjoyed a long relationship with the Oakville Chapter. He says professional engineers were among the first





Ted Chudleigh, MPP Halton  
(Conservative)



delegates to visit him after being elected to Queen's Park. Since then, there have been at least yearly representations through his constituency office.

But while Chudleigh might dispute Zimmer's contention about engineers' tardy efforts to hit the government's radar screen, he agrees about the importance of remaining on the screen.

"In government," he says, "nothing happens very quickly and if the associations have visibility and a relationship with government and opposition, their points of view are respected when solutions are sought."

The New Democratic Party of Ontario has also noticed PEO's proactive stance. During the 2010 Engineering for Ontario Day reception at Queen's Park, NDP leader Andrea Horwath praised the Ontario engineering profession for its willingness to take on a more public profile. "I want to offer my congratulations to PEO for taking this initiative and for offering your advice and expertise in policy development," Horwath said at the time.

To assist in raising its profile in government circles, in 2005 PEO hired Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs, its first full-time government relations consultant in many years.

The firm's president, Howard Brown, has been especially energetic in helping to organize PEO's now-vibrant Government Liaison Program (GLP), a chapter-based initiative dedicated to increasing contact between PEO licence holders and elected representatives. Brown's personal access to MPPs from all three major political parties in Ontario has been a boon to PEO's efforts to forge stronger links between chapters and their local politicians.

As well, Brown has assisted in organizing PEO's now five annual Queen's Park days, which have become high-profile examples of the access the regulator enjoys within government circles. Since the first Queen's Park reception in June 2005, the events have grown in stature and influence, and have been celebrated by all MPPs as an ideal occasion to bring politicians, policy-makers and engineers together in a non-partisan setting.

#### AG SHOWS SUPPORT

At the 2010 Queen's Park reception, Bentley cited PEO and OCEPP for their ability to deliver "practical solutions" for many of the questions faced by government each year. He also lauded the profession for reminding government of its commitment to the greater public good. "Thank you for being members of a regulated profession that remains dedicated to the public interest," Bentley said, "and thanks, too, for pushing us to recognize some of your contributions."

Brown agrees that quantitatively measuring an organization's profile with government leaders can be difficult. However, he says the number of direct contacts between PEO members and MPPs is a good barometer of political outreach and good will. On that score, PEO has moved to a position of strength.

“All political parties have become very supportive of PEO’s work,” Brown says. “People say: ‘How do you measure success?’ There’s probably no MPP in Ontario who hasn’t done at least one event with a PEO chapter.”

Brown suggests November 25, 2010 represents a huge breakthrough for PEO in its government relations efforts, because two senior Ontario cabinet ministers, John Wilkinson of the Ministry of the Environment, and Infrastructure Minister Rick Chiarelli, attended chapter events in Mississauga and Ottawa, respectively.

“Last November 25, PEO achieved a level of significance that I think would be the landmark for any regulator, let alone engineering,” he says, “and when two senior ministers speak at two local chapter meetings in one day to champion major new pieces of legislation, you know you’re on the government’s radar.”

But has Queen’s Park become saturated with PEO and its concerns?

### CREATING A MONSTER?

When David Zimmer was asked rhetorically if he had “created a monster” back in 2003 when he encouraged engineers to become more politically engaged, he had a ready response: “Not at all, because engineering is a highly skilled profession with very talented people. And why would government not want to have that pool of talent at the table, helping us and working with us, and giving us ideas or constructive criticism?”

So, by dint of a lot of hard work, especially at the chapter level, it seems that PEO no longer lacks visibility among policy-makers, or the relationships needed to bring its influence to bear. It’s also apparent the profession has gained new confidence through the process, setting the stage for PEO to dream big and to adopt a vision of becoming “the global leader in professional self-regulation that responsibly improves the quality of life for all.”

As an interested observer of and participant in the project, Brown says it’s time to celebrate the profession’s achievements, not only in building new relationships with legislators, but also in having the confidence to seek to be the best it can be and to tell others about it. “PEO has a certain responsibility, because, ultimately, in the *Professional Engineers Act* it says one of PEO’s tasks is to raise awareness of the role of PEO,” he says. “And if we’re not promoting the profession to the people who carry our legislation, then don’t expect the people who carry our legislation to care what we’re doing when we need their help on issues.” Σ



Chris Bentley, LLB, Ontario attorney general



Andrea Horwath, MPP Hamilton Centre, leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario