

## Discovering a passion for politics

By DAVID SMITH

*The heights by great men reached and kept,  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night.*

Quoting this verse from the poem, *The Ladder of St. Augustine*, by H.W. Longfellow, PEO President Patrick J. Quinn, P.Eng., concluded the association's first-ever campaign college and encouraged his colleagues to start the upward climb to greater political involvement.

The event was designed to provide interested P.Engs with the tools and required knowledge to get more politically active.

"It is right for us, as individuals and as a profession [to get involved]," Quinn told the approximately 50 participants. "We have an obligation to carry our fair share of the load in decision making and in governance. [Engineers] are the practical appliers of science, involved in every axiom of design, manufacture and construction, and we can bring to the decision tables all the background and logic of many of the problems that politics must resolve."

"To make a difference," he determined, "you have to participate in power and the use of power."

Diane Freeman, P.Eng., PEO Vice President, and herself a candidate for municipal council in Kitchener-Waterloo, moderated the session. She welcomed a diverse group of panelists to discuss the importance of getting involved in the political process and the avenues available to get involved.

Also chair of the Regional Councillors Committee that oversees the Government Liaison Program, Freeman said being a part of a self-regulatory regime is a privilege granted by policy from legislators and that, as such, "we must recognize this partnership to increase



Political rivals Deb Matthews, MPP London North Centre and president of the Ontario Liberal Party (left), and Blair McCreadie, president of the PC Party of Ontario, encouraged interested engineers to bring their unique experiences and perspectives to the legislative decision-making tables at PEO's campaign college event in September.

awareness of PEO and contribute to the policy decision-making process."

### Why get involved?

With a bachelor of architecture degree, Peter Milczyn, councillor, Ward 5 (Etobicoke-Lakeshore), City of Toronto, is well versed in the need for professions to be vocal to politicians and supports PEO's Government Liaison Program.

"Some professions are very vocal—the legal profession, the medical profession—but I think, from my own perspective, professions such as architecture and engineering are not vocal enough in pursuing both our professional interests and the related interests that flow from our professions," he said. "[Professional engineers] have a great deal to contribute to the development of policy and the setting of priorities for all levels of government."

According to Blair McCreadie, president, PC Party of Ontario, having more professional engineers involved in government would not only allow for the profession's view to be heard more clearly, but could also help to diffuse potential issues before they escalate into larger problems.

"Politics is about long-term relationship building," he said. "And so, those folks who are active working within the party system, whether it be as part of a caucus in government or opposition, or assisting the party apparatus, *that* is going to get you a seat at the [decision-making] table to make sure the perspective of professional engineers is heard.

"I would think that, for example, the benefit of having more engineers in the Ontario legislature might have come



Peter Milczyn, B. Arch., shared his experiences as a City of Toronto municipal councillor (Ward 5, Etobicoke-Lakeshore).

into some use when [Municipal Affairs and Housing] Minister [John] Gerretsen introduced the amendments to the building code that have, quite frankly, not understood the jurisdiction of the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario.”

Deb Matthews, MPP London North Centre and president of the Ontario Liberal Party, noted that engineers bring a different perspective to the decision-making table.

“Their training is unique. They’re taught to problem solve. They’re taught to look at issues from a logical, pragmatic perspective,” she said. “And I think that we need more of that, not less of that, in public life. I think the voice of engineers has not been heard as much as it should be. I think we’d have better policy if more engineers were involved in the political process.”

### How to get involved

“One of the important things I think a professional engineer can do is get involved in his or her local riding association,” said McCreadie. “That local riding association is really responsible for doing all the various activities that go into election readiness as we

look forward to the October 2007 provincial election. Our party also has an open policy development process whereby we solicit input from party members and stakeholders from across the province to help share their ideas.”

Although unable to attend in person, in a subsequent interview for a campaign college summary DVD, Rosario Marchese, NDP caucus chair and MPP Trinity-Spadina, offered that anyone with political aspirations should start by getting involved in the political party of their choice.

“And,” he added, “you’ve got to be a member of the riding association. You’ve got to show that you are a person who has the skills to be able to be a candidate. You have to show the riding association that you are the person they should back in a nomination fight.”

Christine Elliott, MPP Whitby-Ajax, said there’s a place for everyone in the political process, even if they have no interest in seeking election.

“There are lots of ways one could get involved without being the actual candidate,” she said. “Certainly, there are all kinds of volunteer positions that can be served from being a member of the riding association, to specific positions within campaigns—financial officer, cam-

paign manager, the sign crew, going door-to-door with the candidate.”

The determining factor is a strong dedication to a cause close to your heart, Elliott noted. A champion for people with special needs, she said: “Everyone has a place in politics and those who choose to enter must have a passion...since there can be long hours with little money.”

The need for passion about an issue to succeed in politics was echoed by many of the panelists, including Omar Alhabra, P.Eng., MP Mississauga-Erindale.

“I think the most successful way to be engaged politically is not to start off by picking a party, or picking a government level. It’s actually by defining what issues you’re interested in,” he said. “It is important that you identify issues that you are passionate about and be able to effectively communicate these passions.”

Alhabra perfectly summed up the intent of the session when he encouraged his professional colleagues to recognize their responsibility to become involved in the federal and provincial legislatures, as well as on city councils, saying: “We need people to re-engineer these institutions.”

Campaign college was held at PEO on September 7. A DVD summary, entitled *The why and how to get involved in public life*, has been created as a training tool and for those who were unable to attend the event. Copies of the DVD will be distributed to PEO’s chapters and made available on the PEO website. ❖

Mississauga-Erindale MP Omar Alhabra, P.Eng., called on his professional colleagues to re-engineer the institutions of government.



## Engineering for Ontarians Day update

Due to scheduling conflicts, PEO did not hold a second Engineering for Ontarians Day at Queen’s Park on October 23 as had been tentatively reported in the September/October issue of *Engineering Dimensions*. Instead, the event will be rescheduled to 2007. Keep an eye on this column and the PEO website for further details.