

TIMING IS EVERYTHING



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President

JUST TWO DAYS prior to PEO's sixth annual MPP reception at Queen's Park, the premier of Ontario resigned and adjourned the Ontario legislature indefinitely.

In spite of this announcement, we decided to carry on with the event, even if the circumstances were suddenly less than ideal. Nonetheless, the reception provided a forum for our Government Liaison Program (GLP) representatives to gather, exchange ideas and suc-

cesses, and celebrate the tremendous work they've been doing alongside our elected officials. Thirty-two MPPs and six cabinet ministers were in attendance.

The work of our GLP becomes even more important now with upheaval in the province's political landscape. With new leadership on the way and a provincial election a possibility in the new year, our government liaison volunteers will be called upon to reinforce PEO's mandate, and share our ideals with an even greater audience. I anticipate that our volunteers will be quite busy over the next 12 months or so. Among their first messages will be that PEO currently has several regulation changes and proclamation of the repeal of section 12(3)(a) of the *Professional Engineers Act* working their way through the government's approval process, and that this work must continue.

Prior to the premier's announcement, we had held several discussions with Dalton McGuinty's office on the concept of an Ontario provincial engineer, a position much like the province's chief medical officer of health. As noted in the last issue of *Engineering Dimensions*, an Ontario provincial engineer could have overall authority for engineering works in Ontario, to provide direction in the event of situations like the Algo Centre Mall collapse in Elliot Lake.

PEO was created 90 years ago by the first *Professional Engineers Act*, which today authorizes it to govern its licence and certificate holders and regulate engineering practice. However, our authority under our act has limits. For instance, if PEO identifies what it thinks is a systemic engineering design or supervision problem during its investigation of a complaint against an individual licence or certificate holder, it does not have authority to investigate all the other potential manifestations of the same problem. It can only act where a problem involving a particular engineering work or practitioner has come to light. An independent Ontario provincial engineer,

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who is an officer of the legislature, would be in a position to act in such instances where PEO is not.

Further, in this information age, it is becoming more difficult for public policy-makers to evaluate and integrate the information provided by myriad interest groups. Each group, understandably, is focused on its own aspect of policy issues that often, to understand their full scope and potential solutions, require considerable technical knowledge. Such issues may also involve several ministries, making coordination difficult. An independent Ontario provincial engineer could provide the necessary review, analysis and integration of information to help ensure the most effective technical solutions to pressing policy problems.

Talks with the premier's staff on our provincial engineer concept are continuing, but this unexpected break to the ability to pass new legislation to make it a reality does provide us an opportunity to develop our idea further and take it to all MPPs so that we may engage them in the discussion. I'm pleased with the interest our concept has received so far from both government and media.

We also introduced the concept nationally last month in Ottawa with representatives from Engineers Canada and its constituent members. Indeed, PEO's call for a provincial engineer is not the first time this sort of thing has been considered. Engineers Canada has broached the idea of such an engineer with national responsibility to the federal government, but because engineering is a provincial matter, it has not yet been considered.

I think the idea makes sense for our province and, over the next several months, I will continue to advance these discussions, so that PEO can work with government to improve engineering practice and public safety. I welcome feedback on this idea and am happy to discuss the concept in more detail with all who are interested. Σ