

# A matter of commitment



by Pat Quinn, P.Eng., President

**C**hange occurs around us constantly—and it changes us. In today's world, we're called upon to adapt to change more often and more quickly than ever before. If we don't, we're left behind or, possibly, even become extinct.

Sometimes we're driven to adapt, not just by the change happening around us, but also by our own evolving vision, foresight and personal commitment. I believe we're at a critical juncture in our evolution as a profession. It's a time when vision, foresight and personal commitment are badly needed, a time when each one of us must look beyond our individual best interests and consider the best interests of our colleagues, especially our younger members—the future of our profession. Unless we care about their future and the survival of our profession, and take proactive steps to revitalize it, our future will be shaped by the forces of chance. The outcome can only be negative.

At a recent national meeting of engineers, a past PEO president quizzed me about recent changes in our association. When I described our philosophy of inclusiveness, of reaching out to all those practising engineering—particularly those practising engineering in all its new forms—he bluntly asked why we needed to do this and, furthermore, why I should care. Assuming that we love our profession, and recognize the benefits and fulfillment it brings us, should we not take this tremendous opportunity to renew our profession and reposition it to take its rightful place among the other senior professions, as we enter a new era?

Perhaps we are concerned that any collective, such as an advocacy organization, will require us all to sing from the same songbook and suppress individual initiative. The same could be said about democ-

racy, an institution Churchill said wasn't the best, but was the best we had found, and one in which individual initiative flourishes. I believe a strong advocacy organization could encourage individual contributions in many areas, while raising the profile and stature of the profession.

## Status report coming

Another change in PEO is the commitment to keep members informed and to require your informed consent before making major changes. The Joint PEO/CSPE Advocacy Implementation Committee, chaired by Robert Goodings, P.Eng., has done much work toward creating a renewed advocacy body, to be known as the Ontario Society for Professional Engineers (OSPE). You've been informed at every step along the way. In the next few months, members will be given a status report, which will set out an organizational structure and implementation plan. Later, there will be a referendum for your final approval to proceed.

There has been considerable discussion on the question to be put to members in a referendum, and concern about interpretation of the results. Personally, I'm in favour of a direct question on the cost and on our members' willingness to commit to financial support of OSPE. I believe engineers who care for their profession (presumably all of us) understand that we have an obligation to promote and protect our profession, and that this requires a commitment of funds. In a world of many clamoring voices, our profession must develop a strong, sure, proactive voice, if we expect to have real influence in decision-making forums, and society at large.

## Wish list of advocacy/ member services

I believe OSPE could and should:

- ◆ contribute to debate in society on issues where engineering know-how is invaluable. These might include privatized high-

ways and their standards; the privatization of energy, water, regulatory inspection, supervision of public safety, environmental and construction responsibilities. We should also decide if we have anything to contribute to the debate on education funding and teaching;

- ◆ establish a database for the profession, to assist studies on trends in employment, emerging and declining disciplines, and engineering patterns and education in universities; the career paths of engineers; and immigration and emigration of engineers;
- ◆ monitor societal changes affecting engineers, such as information technology, trade issues, emerging engineering needs and requirements, and educational issues;
- ◆ establish local branches for engaging students, engineers, and their neighbours, in a sense of community;
- ◆ provide facilities for training and ongoing education and skills development, and for nurturing engineers as leaders of our profession and for political participation;
- ◆ undertake many other initiatives where the well-being of our profession and society can be advanced by creative engineering input.

## A simple question

The simple question is, would you pay \$50 to \$100 a year to support such activities? Self-employed physicians pay \$900 in dues to the Ontario Medical Association, their advocacy/member services organization. Practising lawyers pay up to \$400 a year to belong to the Canadian Bar Association (Ontario).

There is a cost to democracy; we pay for its benefits. There is also a cost to supporting our profession and being worthy professionals. We should ask ourselves John F. Kennedy's question about commitment: it's not what our profession can do for us, but what we can do for our profession. That's why we should care, and why I ask you all to consider your commitment. ◆