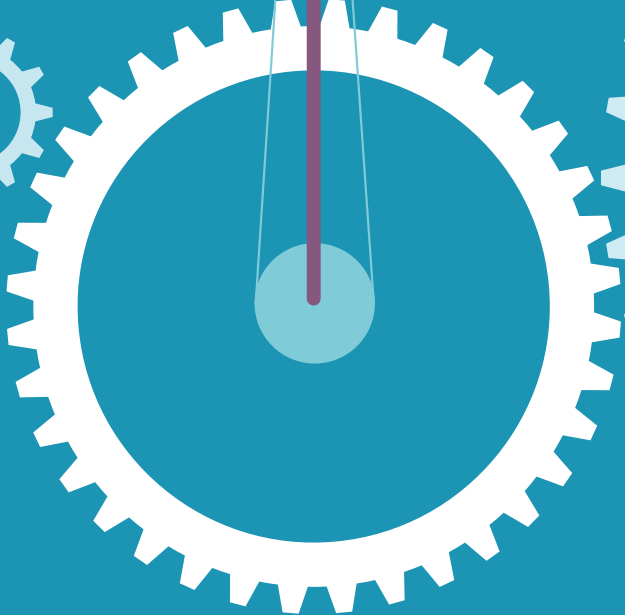


PEO looking forward to second decade of government liaison work



By Michael Mastromatteo

PEO's Government Liaison Program has hit the 10-year milestone. What began as an effort to counter government incursion into PEO's regulatory domain has evolved into a vehicle to assist policy-makers and to celebrate professional engineering in the public interest.



It is commonly understood in Ontario engineering circles that PEO's successful court challenge in 2006 of the Ontario housing ministry's effort to impose its qualification system on an element of engineering practice ushered in a whole new era of active government relations efforts for the association.

Often described as the BRRAG or Bill 124 battle, PEO's request for a judicial review of the application of the ministry's qualification regime to an already regulated profession made clear that the engineering regulator would not tolerate conflicts with its jurisdiction under the *Professional Engineers Act* to regulate the practice of professional engineering in the public interest.

Prior to seeking the judicial review, then PEO CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., FEC, sought an audience with then Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant to argue PEO's case.

"I voiced frustration at what we viewed as a rash of incursions into PEO's regulatory jurisdiction," Allen recalls. "Minister Bryant's message to us was simple—it was up to us to educate legislators about the value of our self-regulation."

Now CEO of Engineers Canada, Allen took the attorney general's message to heart. After a chance meeting with government relations specialist Howard Brown, Allen decided a more active government relations program would bring great benefit to the regulator.

"PEO needed new tools to make it happen," Allen told *Engineering Dimensions* in February. "Thus, the Government Liaison Program [GLP] was officially launched in January 2005. The [initial] vote at council was very close, as there was concern about lobbying for the public interest versus advancing our self-interest. That concern by council drove home that the program as it started out, and as it remains today, must only be a means for PEO to get on the same side of the table with government to address public interest challenges related to engineering. It is not there to advance the self-interest of engineers."

What began as a pilot project in 2005 within two years was an established part of PEO operations.

FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

As former PEO president George Comrie, P.Eng., FEC, noted in 2012: "With the inauguration of its current Government Liaison Program, PEO council asserted the Ontario regulator's role as a stakeholder in government and public policy. Thus far, its largest action to raise our respect with government has been the successful fight over an ill-advised amendment to the Ontario Building Code and regulations in 2004. Overnight, professional engineers became a force to be reckoned with in Ontario politics."

The GLP began modestly with Brown being retained to spread PEO messages among MPPs at Queen's Park. The program also became operational along chapter lines with each chapter establishing a GLP subcommittee to meet local elected officials and to organize such events as chapter-based town hall meetings—usually in conjunction with federal or provincial elections. Another early initiative was the Cam-



Take Your MPP to Work Day has become a popular way for PEO chapters to participate directly in the Government Liaison Program. On January 21, the London Chapter hosted London-Fanshawe MPP Teresa Armstrong (second from right) for a tour of the Upper Thames Valley Conservation Authority. With Armstrong are (left to right) London Chapter Vice Chair Imtiaz Shah, P.Eng., PEO Government Liaison Committee Chair Darla Campbell, P.Eng., and London Chapter GLP Chair Tomiwa Olukiyesi, P.Eng.



A Take Your MPP to Work Day event in August 2013 attracted a crowd of engineers and Oakville Chapter members. Oakville MPP and Minister of Labour Kevin Flynn (fourth from left) was joined for a tour of Siemens Canada by (left to right) then Chapter Chair Warren Turnbull, P.Eng., then Chapter GLP Chair Ankesch Siddhantakar, EIT, Siemens Canada CEO Robert Hardt, Siemens VP Lucy Casacia, Darla Campbell, P.Eng., PEO Councillor Rob Willson, P.Eng., and then chapter executive member Fred Dattoo, P.Eng.



paign Colleges, which are dedicated to offering insights to PEO members interested in standing for election to municipal or provincial posts.

One of the most prominent GLP activities is the now annual engineering reception at Queen's Park. Initiated in 2005, the receptions bring engineers and legislators together to celebrate the profession and to remind government leaders of PEO's core objectives. At the 2014 engineering reception, Ontario Attorney General Madeleine Meilleur paid tribute to PEO for its government relations work and, in particular, for "advancing the profession."

"During the early years working with Howard Brown, we experimented with many practices to find what would best work within the PEO context," Allen says. "Howard's dedication, contacts and willingness to work all out helped shape the GLP into an effective program."

As the program matured, PEO added new elements. For example, the Government Liaison Committee (GLC) was established in 2011 with Barry Steinberg, P.Eng., CEO of Consulting Engineers of Ontario, its first chair. With the launch of the committee, staff support to the program was transferred to Jeannette Chau, P.Eng., who became manager, student and government liaison programs. As the coordinating body for the GLP, the GLC was structured to include representation from PEO, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), Engineers Canada, and the Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario, making it representative of the wider engineering community.

More recently, the GLP introduced "Take Your MPP to Work Day," which sees a local MPP tour an engineering facility as a guest of a PEO member. The most recent such day took place January 21 with PEO's London Chapter hosting MPP Teresa Armstrong.

The GLP today continues to operate to ensure that government, PEO members and the public all recognize PEO's regulatory mandate and, in particular, its contributions to maintaining the highest levels of professionalism among engineers working in the public interest. The program also positions PEO as having unique knowledge and expertise, which would be of benefit to government when it is considering new policy directions that may have an impact on the regulation of the practice of professional engineering and the safety of the people of Ontario.

PEO AS A PARTNER

The ultimate aim of the GLP is to have the provincial government regard PEO as a partner that ought to have influence and an impact on the direction of policies applicable to the engineering profession.

A second milestone for PEO's government liaison work occurred over the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*. The provincial government made access to regulated occupations, particularly for internationally educated professionals, a priority issue, forcing some regulators to take stock of their registration practices.

“PEO was engaged from the start in late 2004,” Allen says. “We worked effectively with the responsible ministers and with Judge George Thompson, who was charged with reviewing appeal processes in Ontario’s regulated professions. PEO was the only regulator to support government from start to finish.”

Allen is especially gratified with the GLP’s role in guiding the provincial government’s *Open for Business Act, 2010*, which, among other things, included a new definition of professional engineering. It also allowed PEO to make a number of administrative and governance enhancements.

“Through the efforts of GLP, PEO was able to achieve 66 amendments to its *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA) through the government’s open for business legislation,” Allen says. “The PEO changes took up more than 10 per cent of the bill. These were the first major amendments to the PEA in more than 25 years. It reflected the provincial government’s commitment to a strong engineering profession that can best serve the public and respond to the needs of Ontario businesses and individuals seeking to be licensed to practise professional engineering.”

THE CHAPTER FACTOR

The involvement of PEO’s 36 chapters through the GLP has proven to be a valuable addition to PEO’s government relations work.

Gerry Meade, P.Eng., the first chair of York Chapter’s GLP Committee, cites meetings with local Liberal party MPPs, including Helena Jaczek of Oak Ridges-Markham, as one of the highlights of the chapter’s early government relations work.

“Dr. Jaczek noted that we were the first group she had met who asked what we could do to help her and the community rather than asking for help,” Meade says. One outgrowth of the MPP meeting was the formation of a York Chapter committee to review electricity supply issues in York Region. It was one of the earliest examples of engineers recommending policy ideas in the key energy sector.

“It’s crucial for professional engineers to be engaged at all levels of the political process,” Meade says, regarding PEO’s government relations work. “[The government’s] policy decisions have a great impact on our profession and we are often the ones who have to implement those decisions. In addition, they are making decisions related to important technical matters. We have to ensure that they have the necessary information to make those decisions.”

GIANT LEAP FORWARD

In the Windsor area, government relations work has also paid rich dividends. Andrew Dowie, P.Eng., chair of the Windsor Chapter GLP Committee, and a new member of Tecumseh municipal council, says Windsor-area MPPs have been highly receptive to political outreach work.

“[Local MPPs] have participated in a number of initiatives and were incredibly responsive with respect to recent legislative matters involving PEO,” Dowie told *Engineering Dimensions*. “Former MPP Teresa Piruzza even provided each



Whitby MPP and current Progressive Conservative party leadership candidate Christine Elliott (left) and Willowdale MPP and current Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Zimmer, LLB, were among the high-profile speakers at PEO’s Candidate College October 14, 2009. Then PEO President Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng., FEC, is at the podium. The event brought together a diverse group of legislators who shared their thoughts on how engineers can engage with government and bring their message to the widest possible audience.

Current Ontario Deputy Premier and Treasury Board President Deb Matthews traded anecdotes with political rival Blair McCreadie, past president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, at PEO’s first-ever Campaign College in September 2006. The event, which included engineers and legislators from all levels of government, was one of the regulator’s early government liaison efforts.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne (centre) hosts her annual summer reception, which in 2014 became the setting for an engineering-related conversation among (left to right) Sandro Perruzza, CEO, Ontario Society of Professional Engineers; PEO President David Adams, P.Eng., FEC; Ping Wu, P.Eng., president, Professional Engineers Government of Ontario; and Harmail Basi, P.Eng., of the Grand River Chapter.



PEO's government liaison work has afforded new opportunities for engineers to meet representatives at all levels of government. In May 2010, then PEO President Diane Freeman, P.Eng., FEC (left), met former governor general Michaëlle Jean (far right) at a Canadian Club of Toronto event to discuss engineers' role in humanitarian work. Second from left is Howard Brown of Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs Inc. Next to him is John Capobianco, then president of the Canadian Club of Toronto.

The 2013 Queen's Park reception was the scene for this meeting with (left to right) Mark Haynes, P.Eng., of the Simcoe-Muskoka Chapter, Darla Campbell, P.Eng., current chair of the Government Liaison Committee, Richmond Hill MPP and Minister of Research and Innovation and now also Colleges, Training and Universities Reza Moridi, and Mike Kovacs, EIT, past president of the Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario. PEO's Government Liaison Program has long made efforts to include engineering students and EITs in its work.



Then Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley, LLB, praised PEO's government relations work at the 2008 Queen's Park reception. He also cited the regulator for the profession's commitment to help in developing technically sound public policy. The annual receptions are a high point of the regulator's ongoing efforts to forge positive relations between engineers and provincial legislators.

of our new licensees with scrolls to celebrate their achievement. When the program was in its infancy, we wouldn't get our calls returned from local MPPs, so where we are at now represents a giant leap forward."

Dowie says the GLP has encouraged more engineers to engage in local politics. "There has been an uptick in recent years regarding professional engineers stepping forward for civic engagement roles, where we did not often see this in the past. We have a credible message to convey and having more engineers step up and engage with government can serve to enhance the awareness of engineering, and the considerations that go into it, into our community's consciousness."

MEASURING SUCCESS

Now 10 years into the program, PEO's GLP can measure success in a number of ways. The Queen's Park receptions continue to attract dozens of MPPs from all parties each fall. PEO town hall meetings have been used as a venue for Ontario cabinet members to make major announcements and, as government relations consultant Brown has noted, every sitting MPP at Queen's Park has had at least one interaction with an engineering group.

"Over the 10 years, what continues to really impress me is the true dedication of engineers, PEO presidents, council and PEO staff to engage with politicians to protect and serve the public interest, to build a better province and country, and that most politicians are interested in exactly the same thing," says Kim Allen. "When we respect each other and work together, we achieve our mutual goal of protecting and serving the public interest."

It's a far cry from the days of engineering as the silent profession and from the time an attorney general would admonish the regulator to go about educating legislators as to what it is all about.

Despite its record of achievement, however, PEO's government relations program is still a work in progress. "There's definitely still room to grow," says program manager Chau. "It's still about relationship building and letting government officials know that engineers are the ones they should look to for help and advice on certain policy matters."

It's a view echoed by Darla Campbell, P.Eng., who recently succeeded Steinberg as chair of the GLC.

"Let's seek to improve in areas where we can be more effective and efficient," Campbell says. "Engineers know the value of innovation and sometimes we need to focus on not reinventing the wheel. Chapters can learn from each other, from the successes—and lessons learned—in GLP activities. We will continue to work closely with OSPE to ensure that we support each other's government liaison initiatives."

As for indicators of GLP success, Campbell referred to a meeting with MPP Bob Delaney (Mississauga-Streetsville) at the November 5, 2014 Queen's Park reception. "We asked him how PEO could build better relationships with MPPs. We were told that the efforts of PEO in the past few years have been exemplary and a model that other associations should follow." Σ