

## MPPs KEY IN HELPING REGULATORS GET THEIR MESSAGE ACROSS

By Howard Brown and Blake Keidan



Mike Colle, MPP, Eglinton-Lawrence (third from left), took part in a GLP Take Your MPP to Work Day at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute on April 22, 2014. With him are, left to right: Jacob Kachuba, P.Eng.; William Cachia, manager, outpatient services, University Health Network; Parvin Marzban, P.Eng., Toronto West Chapter GLP chair; Rob Willson, P.Eng., then PEO councillor; and Georg Kralik, P.Eng., past chair, West Toronto Chapter.

PEO HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED for the effectiveness of its Government Liaison Program (GLP) by many. Former MPP Christine Elliot has said many times she felt lawyers would benefit from introducing a similar program, and was particularly impressed that PEO was making efforts to get more engineers elected as MPPs.

One of the MPPs who has been a long-time advocate for PEO is Mike Colle, MPP, Eglinton-Lawrence. First elected in 1995, he's served on both government and opposition benches, including a period as minister of citizenship and immigration.

One of his proudest achievements as minister, he says, was working directly with PEO in 2007 on the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, which improved the ability of regulators to ensure international engineering graduates are given the tools to be licensed in Ontario. It also saw the introduction of the Office of the Ontario Fairness Commissioner, aimed at ensuring everyone qualified to practise in an Ontario regulated profession gets a licence.

In a January 15 interview, Colle expressed strong support for PEO's GLP, stressing how grassroots movements are necessary and beneficial for an organization's success.

"Witnessing a 20-year period as an MPP, I've seen some excellent government relations programs," says Colle. "I saw PEO go from no government relations to having a very enriched involvement. I have been impressed with their work on getting internationally trained engineers licensed, their Take Your MPP to Work days and their participation in MPP events. It is

without a doubt a no-brainer that it is critical to the relationship between MPPs and engineers."

Colle says MPPs get a lot of requests for their time. The organizations that tend to get heard are those speaking with MPPs on a regular basis, attending events, hosting meetings and engaging them in the organization's activities.

Having a government relations program builds relationships with elected officials. These connections open doors that may otherwise remain closed. It is the only way to make progress for your cause within the government.

"Whether for credentials, training, health and safety, or licensing, relationships matter," says Colle. "Issues are totally in the hands of government, whether you like it or not. It's important for engineers to be at the table. If you're not at the table they will make decisions without you! Top officials, like the premier, are often overwhelmed," he continues. "Doors are not always open. The way to achieve success is ground up through working with MPPs on legislative committees, cabinet committees, caucus, private member's bills, or even private member's motions."

Not every profession has a government relations program or strategy. But the ones that do are in the news, constantly fighting for their issues and achieving success. Colle spoke of the success of other regulators and professions in having their point of view heard.

"Nurses are constantly talking to government," Colle says. "Teachers are in constant interaction with government. Police, fire and EMS are in touch constantly. There isn't a day that goes by when there isn't a discussion...They wouldn't dream of not being in touch with their MPPs."

"Ignoring MPPs undercuts your grassroots efforts," stresses Colle. "By not focusing on MPPs, you put all your eggs in one basket. You're competing with everyone else like the manufacturers, hospitals and municipalities. By having a grassroots organization you have a better chance of having your voice heard. There is a small doorway with lots of people trying to get in. The door is not always open at the top, but with MPPs, sooner or later you are going to be heard."

Sometimes there are disappointments when organizations don't get the support of government. "That means you have to redouble your efforts, not abandon them," he says.  $\Sigma$

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