

## ONTARIO ENGINEERS FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

By Howard Brown and Blake Keidan

IN THE JULY/AUGUST 2015 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* we predicted the 2015 Canadian federal election was going to be interesting. It certainly was.

The 42nd general election was the longest since 1872 (lasting 78 days), with the highest turnout in over 20 years. It is the only time in Canadian history that the third-place party was elected to government, let alone with a majority. October 19 was a historic moment.

In the election, six engineers from four provinces were elected as MPs. They are:

- Ontario: Omar Alghabra, P.Eng., MP (Mississauga Centre), and Marilyn Gladu, P.Eng., MP (Sarnia-Lambton);
- Quebec: Steven Blaney, P.Eng., MP (Bellechase-Les Etchemins-Lévis), and Marc Garneau, P.Eng., MP (Westmount-Ville-Marie);
- British Columbia: Sukh Dhaliwal, P.Eng., MP (Surrey-Newton); and
- Newfoundland: Nick Whalen, P.Eng., MP (St. John's East).

The two engineers from Ontario are set to make a big difference in the house.

Alghabra was re-elected in his riding after defeating long-time Conservative MP Bob Dechert. He served as the MP for Mississauga-Erindale from 2006 to 2008, but was defeated in 2008 and 2011. Alghabra has volunteered with PEO in the past and moderated the Engineers Want In conference last March, which was jointly hosted by the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, Ryerson University and PEO. On December 3, he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs.

On winning re-election, Alghabra told a reporter at *The Eyeopener* that he, “hopes to bring to Ottawa a fresh perspective...a voice that is perhaps not often heard. My own passion and my own commitment to equality, to justice, to wanting to see this country move forward.”

Also historic was the election of Gladu, the first female professional engineer elected in Canada. Gladu was chair, and national director of science and industrial policy, with the Canadian Society of Chemical Engineers. She has been part of the Sarnia-Lambton community for over 30 years, employed at Dow Chemical, Suncor and then WorleyParsons, and actively involved in her riding, working with Bob Bailey, MPP (Sarnia-Lambton), and PC natural resources critic, for many years. On November 21 it was announced that Gladu will be the new science critic with the official opposition.

About her election as an MP, Gladu says: “I’m excited to be the first female engineer to ever be elected to the House of Commons. It sets the bar high to perform to our credit. I think there are four areas of competency that engineers can bring to government: engineers can solve complex problems, make fact-based scientific decisions, act with a higher ethical standard and ensure the safety and security of the public.” Gladu promises to be “an advocate for engineers having a strong



Marilyn Gladu, P.Eng., MP (Sarnia-Lambton)

Omar Alghabra, P.Eng., MP (Mississauga Centre)

voice in government” and believes this election provides “a great opportunity to be more collaborative, more inclusive and more professional.”

Engineers will play an important role in parliament and bring relevant experience to their new roles. Garneau, the first Canadian in space and former president of the Canadian Space Agency, was appointed minister of transportation on November 4. He says he will focus his time “providing a transportation system that is safe, reliable and facilitates trade and the movement of people and goods.”

In addition to an engineer in his cabinet and four engineers in his caucus, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has long had an interest in engineering. In his 2014 biography *Common Ground*, Trudeau said: “In the fall of 2002, I started at the University of Montreal’s École Polytechnique, to develop my scientific side by studying engineering. I’ve always loved engineering: the practical application of math and science to real-world situations appealed to me deeply.” In his book he also mentions that he met his wife while studying engineering. Although he never finished engineering, it clearly still interests him.

The election may be over, but following what the six elected engineers will accomplish is sure to be exciting! Σ

Howard Brown is president of Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs Inc., and PEO’s government relations consultant. Blake Keidan is an account coordinator at Brown & Cohen, and PEO’s government relations coordinator.