

REGULATOR LEARNS HOW TO DEVELOP ONE VOICE AT THE FIRST PEO/OSPE GOVERNMENT RELATIONS CONFERENCE

By Howard Brown and Blake Keidan



Participants at the PEO/OSPE Government Relations Conference gathered for a group photo on the main staircase of Hart House of the University of Toronto. Flanking MPP Arthur Potts (front row, centre) are PEO President George Comrie, P.Eng., FEC (left), and OSPE President and Chair Michael Monette, P.Eng. (right). PEO Registrar Gerard McDonald, P.Eng., and OSPE CEO Sandro Perruzza are at the far right side of the first row.

An all-party panel of MPPs, including (left to right) Jim McDonell, P.Eng. (PC, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry), Arthur Potts (Liberal, Beaches-East York) and Catherine Fife (NDP, Kitchener-Waterloo), discussed various ways organizations like PEO can bring their message to elected officials.

It's hard to make a friend when you need a friend. Sheena Weir, director of public affairs for the Law Society of Upper Canada, shared this advice in a panel discussion during the first PEO and Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) Government Relations Conference on October 26, 2016. The conference focused on building PEO and OSPE's relationship so they can work together effectively and improve their government relations initiatives. Weir's comment emphasizes the fact that asking for help from someone you have no prior relationship with means they are far less likely to say yes.

The conference panel featured other industry regulatory and advocacy body representatives who discussed best practices for government relations, including Chris Cheung, P.Eng., director of policy and public affairs for the Ontario Bar Association, and Chris May, director of government affairs for the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario. They all spoke extensively, providing specific suggestions on how regulatory and advocacy bodies can work together to build stronger relationships.

"Developing a relationship beforehand means [the government] knows who you are when you go in," said May, reiterating the same point as Weir.

That is why PEO works to build strong relationships with MPPs through the Government Liaison Program. Regulators for other industries take extensive measures to build their own relationships, as Weir and May pointed out. They understand that anything that affects one affects all. "You can build a stronger coalition when all are singing from the same song sheet," said Weir.

DIFFERING ROLES

Like the division of responsibilities across the levels of government, so too are there differing roles between PEO and OSPE for the engineers of Ontario. PEO is the licensing and regulatory body, whereas OSPE advocates with government and provides opportunities for ongoing learning, networking and community building.

When it comes to advocacy, OSPE is working to develop its relationship with government to address issues of policy, such as the engineering labour market, the environment and climate change, or getting more women into the profession. PEO, on the other hand, is working to develop relationships in its work with government to regulate the profession. When PEO needs to change legislation or raise its profile, it helps to have government insiders guiding them through the process.

For example, PEO has been fighting for the repeal of section 12(3)(a) of the *Professional Engineers Act* for years. In the 2015 Fall Economic Statement, the government said it

would discontinue the repeal—and this was formalized last year in the 2016 *Burden Reduction Act*.

Thanks to its relationships with MPPs, PEO was able to achieve the following in 2016:

- Vic Fedeli, MPP (Nipissing), Progressive Conservative (PC) finance critic, tabled an Order Paper Question to the Ministry of Labour on February 16.
- Jagmeet Singh, MPP (Bramalea-Gore-Malton), New Democratic Party (NDP) deputy leader, and attorney general and government and consumer services critic, tabled an Order Paper Question to the Ministry of Labour on February 16.
- The following all spoke out in favour of PEO's position in the legislature when the *Burden Reduction Act* was discussed on November 15: Steve Clark, MPP (Leeds-Grenville), deputy PC leader and tourism, culture and sport critic; Wayne Gates, MPP (Niagara Falls), NDP transportation critic; Monte McNaughton, MPP (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex), PC economic development, employment, growth and infrastructure critic; Taras Natyshak, MPP (Essex), NDP economic development, employment and infrastructure critic; Peggy Sattler, MPP (London West), NDP women's issues, training, colleges, universities, research and innovation critic; and Jagmeet Singh.

PEO's relationships have been tremendously valuable when addressing regulatory issues like the industrial exception, the building code and more. As PEO representatives learned at the conference, regulators need to be consistent in their contact with MPPs in order to build lasting relationships.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, MPP (Hamilton Centre), delivered the afternoon keynote speech at the conference. She congratulated PEO and OSPE on their high standards and for the hard work they carry out in the province. She also reaffirmed her party's support for PEO in repealing the industrial exception, citing it as a matter of public safety.

The conference also had an MPP panel, which included Arthur Potts, MPP (Beaches-East York), parliamentary assistant to the minister of the environment and climate change; Jim McDonnell, P.Eng., MPP (Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry), PC government and consumer services critic; and Catherine Fife, MPP (Kitchener-Waterloo), NDP finance and treasury board critic. They provided a perspective from elected officials about how organizations can better get their message in front of politicians.

OSPE and PEO have a lot to gain from stronger ties moving forward. It is a watershed moment, marking real progress towards effective collaboration. **e**

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