

## **Politics and Engineering – YMF Critical Issues Seminar on Wednesday March 14<sup>th</sup> at the Elephant and Castle Pub**

“We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.” **Thomas Jefferson**

This was the quote that Brian Pallasch recited in his closing remarks to the seminar attendees. As you can probably imagine from the quote above, the central message from the panel to the 30 plus attendees during this year’s annual Critical Issues Seminar was “get more involved, today!”

The panel of experts assembled this year included:

- **Brian T. Pallasch, CAE** - ASCE National Director of Governmental Relations
- **Eric L. Flicker, P.E.** - Chief Financial Officer of Pennoni Associates Inc. & Past National Chairman of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC)
- **Spencer T. Finch, P.E.**- Director of Sustainable Development, Pennsylvania Environmental Council
- **Michael R. Boyer** – Manager of the Office of Long-Range Planning and Congestion Management, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Spencer Finch mentioned that, of the 435 members of congress currently in office, less than 5 are engineers, and none among them have made a major issue of getting funding for the rehabilitation of our nation’s infrastructure. If we do not represent ourselves to our legislators, “we are letting others do surgery on our work.”

**David Petrucci**, our CIS co-chair, did a fine job of asking the panelists poignant questions. They included the following (with responses):

**Q: What are some good first steps** in getting involved to promote public infrastructure funding issues?

**A:**

- Sign up for the ASCE’s Key Contacts Program, (use a yahoo or google account to do so). These newsletters contain a wealth of information about decisions being made that affects us locally and nationally. Also find out who your local legislators are, sign up for your newsletters, and if they don’t have one let them know they should have one: <http://www.asce.org/govrel>
- Go to Harrisburg, spend some time with your state legislators, relate to them and have candid discussions about our issues as engineers. The most likely way to get them to listen is to let it happen through sincere relationships with them.
- Transportation funding is not only a crisis nationally, but on the state level. Go to PennDOT’s website, search for the Transportation Reform Commission’s Report, download and read the proposed solutions to the regional transportation funding crisis.

- Get involved with the local township planning commission. The perspective you bring to the table will be highly valued and earn you solid relationships at the grass roots level. Go to <http://nextgreatcity.org> to find out what Philadelphia mayoral candidates have all added to their campaign agendas for this upcoming election and read about the ways to take action.

**Dave Petrucci** then asked a question that runs through some of our minds.

**Q:** If someone believes that politics is a dirty business, and that they don't want to help sustain the current system, why should we get involved at all?

**A:** The system in place has its flaws, but it still is the best system you will find, with its emphasis on check and balances. If you want to change the system, the best way to do so would be from the inside by developing meaningful relationships

The YMF would like to thank the panelists for taking time to make our event so informative. A great job was done by our committee co-chairs **Dave Petrucci**, who arranged panelists and narrated the event, and **Chris Schaeffer**, who coordinated the venue arrangement and other important details. Also thanks to **Frederick Vesci**, **Sharon Perez-Suarez**, and **John Federico** as the other members of the CIS committee for helping pull the event together.

Links:

Infrastructure report card and Action plan for the 110 Congress

<http://www.asce.org/reportcard/2005/actionplan07.cfm>

ASCE 2006-2007 Policies and Priority

<http://www.asce.org/files/pdf/pressroom/completebookweb.pdf>

ASCE key contacts program

<http://www.asce.org/pressroom/publicpolicy/keycont.cfm>

ASCE FAQ on influencing public policy

(See attachment in e-mail)