

Union Representing Engineers in State Government Opposes Adding Geophysicist to Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors

Peter Thams

The three section chairs of California AEG, Peter Thams, John Pfeiffer and Jared Pratt, along with Charles Nestle of the Legislative Committee met with the union Professional Engineers in California Government (PECG) on February 16, 2010, and were told PECG would not support an effort to place more than one geologist on the Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (BPELS). At a meeting in Assembly Member Hill's office back in December, AEG representatives (Peter Thams and John Pfeiffer) were told that if AEG did not oppose PECG-sponsored Assembly Bill AB 1431, which increases the size of BPELS by one to allow for a geologist and changes the name of the board to include geologists and geophysicists, Assembly Member Hill's office and PECG's lobbyist, Steve Baker, would do everything they could to amend the bill to add a geologist *and a geophysicist*, once the bill cleared the assembly. AB1431 has cleared the Assembly and is moving on to the Senate, where it appears to be doomed to failure because it will likely need to be amended to include an additional public member, increasing the size of the board by two, and the Governor is unlikely to sign it.

PECG, representatives of various professional associations representing engineers, and G. V. Ayers from the Senate Business and Professions Committee also present at the meeting, didn't come right out and say they wouldn't support the addition of a geophysicist or more than one geologist to the BPELS, they simply opposed the only practical option of accomplishing this, which is to maintain the size of the board at thirteen and replace two engineering title acts with the two geology practice acts. Other options that stand no chance of success would be cautiously considered, but engineers were not going to give up their stranglehold on the board. It should be noted that BPELS does not have the majority seven public members stipulated in law, only recently acquired a fifth public member to equal the engineers on the board, and are still outnumbered by technical members that, including a land surveyor, total six. Representatives from Assembly Member Hill's office (author of the bill) and the Governor's office, who were also invited to the meeting, did not attend.

The message was really very simple and was even alluded to if not outright stated: *None of this matters to us and we're not going to waste any more time on it.* It was left up to us (AEG) to garner support from the absent Governor's office to increase the size of the board. So it seems even the PECG proposal as written was doomed to failure from the outset and PECG was just going through the motions to mollify the relatively few geologists they represent in state government. The good news is that all those opposed to adding a geologist and a geophysicist to the board said they would support re-establishing the Board for Geologists and Geophysicists (BGG). The California Sections of AEG are discussing whether to oppose the PECG-sponsored AB1431 unless it is amended or support if amended. Whichever direction is chosen, we will work to amend the bill to include a both a geologist and a geophysicist through legislature with or without the support of PECG or the engineering organizations. Since the February 16th meeting, we have been told that PECG will amend the bill to eliminate geophysicists from the proposed name change in response to protest from BPELS staff.