



Remaining Silent

"Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt."

*Attributed to
Abraham Lincoln*

One of the most difficult lessons I have learned in life is when to remain silent. On more than a few occasions the mere fact that I know nothing about the subject has often proven to be no barrier prior to expounding upon a wide range of subjects. I come by this honestly as being one of 11 children; you had to speak up or you were overlooked. On a serious level though, the CSEG Executive remained silent on the recent Alberta Royalty Review and I felt it appropriate to explain why.

A few of our members had expressed that it would be appropriate we should take a position and voice it accordingly. On an individual level many of us did this. Certainly Mike Clement, Director of Member Services, column last month was part of that process. As part of the oil and gas industry most of us are also part of the Alberta public at large. This gives us the right and perhaps even an obligation to make our feeling known. Why then not a collective response? I refer to Article II of our Bylaws:

The objective of the CSEG is to promote the science of geophysics especially as it applies to exploration. In addition the CSEG has a mandate to promote fellowship and co-operation among those persons with a common bond and interest in geophysics.

You will not find any reference to advocacy, lobbying, or actuarial expertise. This should not be mistaken for indifference. Like many others I saw first hand the reduced activity levels in 2007 and especially the effect the protracted government deliberation period had on our business. In crafting the Bylaws the CSEG architects no doubt felt we were better off saving our ammunition rather than expending it in areas where we have no credibility. Neither Government nor the public at large would have been surprised by any position we took but, more importantly they wouldn't have paid any attention to it. I won't burden the reader by spelling out what that position would be, but am confident it can be inferred.

There is another aspect to this decision other than just competency. Granted that the vast majority of our members are Calgary based and their focus is on Alberta. It is important to remember that we have membership beyond this province. While any royalty review is important recent events in both the Northwest Territories and in Atlantic Canada also have



an impact on our business. Earlier this year I heard first hand appreciation expressed by residents of the North for efforts expended by Environmental groups and NGO's for their contribution on the Pipeline issue. This was quickly followed by the suggestion that perhaps they could now take leave and assist other parts of the country.

Additionally, the ongoing discussions between the Newfoundland and Labrador Government and Industry regarding equity and royalty rates had an impact on offshore development plans. In all 3 cases cited here the issues are serious and impact our livelihood, yet they fall beyond our mandate as a technical society. To comment on one alone would not do justice to our claim as a national association.

If the CSEG were to determine that our mandate needed changing then appropriate resources would have to be added to allow for informed expression. We would need to put in place a committee charged with government relations. I sense no enthusiasm for an initiative of this nature. As difficult as it may be to remain silent it allows for our reputation, as a credible technical society, to remain untarnished. Our industry already has associations, such as CAPP, that make valuable comments on issues of public interest.

A real life example perhaps best illustrates this point. During the long courtship I went through prior to convincing my wife that I was her best choice, I had spent a lot of time impressing her with my vast knowledge. I have convinced myself that this approach was successful in winning her over. I must admit though that she has never confirmed this with me. A couple of years after being married we found ourselves in a pre-natal class. Foolishly, I stood up and took issue with a comment made by the highly trained class instructor. I was immediately challenged to substantiate my comments. Awareness quickly descended upon me that the guys in the dressing room at hockey had never asked me to justify any of my comments. I sheepishly smiled and sat down. In a comforting fashion my wife leaned over and informed me how embarrassed she was.

"Just don't tell the guys on the team", I pleaded. If only I had heeded Mr. Lincoln's advice. **R**

*Doug Bogstie
President*