

Editorial | *United We (and our structures) Stand*

By David W. Mykins, P.E., Chair CASE Executive Committee



In early August of this year, hot on the heels of both major political parties' national conventions, a meeting took place in a secluded hotel conference room in downtown Chicago that, despite including many high-ranking officials from national organizations, has received distressingly little coverage in the mass media. I'm referring of course to the summer meeting of the leaders of CASE (Council of American Structural Engineers), NCSEA (National Council of Structural Engineers Associations) and SEI (Structural Engineering Institute).

Unlike our major political parties, these three organizations share a single platform: supporting and elevating the profession of structural engineering, in practice, research and education. Each of these groups provides services and resources that are unique and complementary in support of that goal. As a reader of STRUCTURE magazine, you are probably aware that while NCSEA takes the lead, it is published through the combined efforts of all three groups. In fact, we take turns giving you our two cents on the latest topics in structural engineering in this very column every month.

This cooperative effort is in large part what makes STRUCTURE magazine one of the most informative, educational and relevant publications for structural engineers. At a recent meeting at the Structures Congress, we began to wonder whether there were other ways in which we could collaborate and combine our respective strengths to enhance the profession. As a first step to explore this, we decided to get together during the CASE Summer Risk Management Seminar.

Like most meetings, we started with introductions and a statement of purpose. We then talked about the accomplishments and goals of our groups. Now, I consider myself pretty involved but, as I sat and listened to the leaders of SEI and NCSEA, I had to ask myself "How do I not know this?" For example, how did I not know about SEI's initiative to become a more global organization, and NCSEA's plans to build a database of engineers who would be available to help in disasters?

Even though the three organizations have existed and worked together for more than two decades, we seemed to have existed in silos. We are very good at what we do, but sometimes you have to look around at what others are doing to help guide your direction. Or at least to make sure you aren't duplicating efforts.

Since we were not fully aware of some of the details of the other groups, it follows that others might not be. In that spirit, I'd like to share some basic information about CASE with you.

CASE is one of six practice-based coalitions within the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC). Rather than individual membership, our members are firms. So all of the engineers in our



member firms are members too. We represent over 160 firms employing more than ten thousand structural engineers nationwide. Our member firms range from sole proprietors to some of the largest firms in the nation.

We are organized into five committees who are always working on new products to help our profession. They are:

- Contracts
- Guidelines
- Programs and Communications
- Toolkit
- Membership

So what does CASE do? Our mission is to improve the practice of structural engineering. We give you practical tools to help you reduce risk and make you more efficient and more profitable. These include national practice guidelines that outline best practices, contracts designed specifically for structural engineers, and an extensive list of risk management tools and educational sessions designed to keep liability in check. All of our products and publications are designed to be "plug and play". We have, for example, a project kick-off meeting agenda and site inspection checklists that you could start using today. To learn more about CASE, visit our website at www.acec.org/CASE.

Our meeting in Chicago was eye-opening for all of us and, in the end, we resolved to have more frequent discussions and explore our respective strengths to develop ways we can support each other and avoid duplication of effort. We discovered that we have a unique opportunity to reach the structural engineering community worldwide and influence the practice in a big way. The first step toward meeting this goal is the refreshing of our 20-year-old cooperative agreements. What are now three separate agreements will be combined into one joint agreement.

Maybe structural engineers won't ever get the mass media coverage we deserve for the work we do. But in the spirit of this election season, let's take inspiration from one of our great historic political activists, Thomas Paine, who said, "It's not in numbers, but in unity that our great strength lies." ■



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