

Lawmakers should be sure to tap in to engineering authority and infrastructure

As the only society representing licensed Professional Engineers of all disciplines, the National Society of Professional Engineers was extremely saddened by the I-35 bridge collapse in Minnesota. As professional engineers, we value the public's health, safety, and welfare above all else, and our thoughts and condolences go out to the victims, their families, and the citizens of Minneapolis at this time.

If any good can come from such a tragedy, the spotlight is now being thrown onto the serious problem of the aging infrastructure in the U.S. For example, on Aug. 2, the Senate unanimously passed the National Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2007, which would establish a national commission to ensure U.S. infrastructure

meets current and future demands while facilitating economic growth. NSPE supports this act and strongly urges the House to take action on their version of the bill.

This legislation comes too soon. According to groups like the Urban Land Institute, the United States would need to spend over \$1 trillion in the next three years just to keep the current infrastructure from deteriorating. That figure doesn't include any major

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improvements, or the building of any new infrastructure. Estimates also show that close to 97 percent of roads, bridges, and tunnels will require some type of improvement in the coming years. These statistics speak to the enormity of the issue, and citizens and engineers alike must stay vigilant in their demands that these issues be addressed in order to ensure the protection of the public's health and safety into the future.

As professional engineers, we are extremely concerned about the issue of engineering authority that instances like this can raise. Federal, state, and local lawmakers need to take steps to ensure that professional engineers are in positions of authority to make engineering judgments that affect the public health and safety. We as

engineers need to ensure that lawmakers are adequately educated to make informed decisions on engineering issues. What becomes clear is that we need more engineers and technically trained professionals in elected positions. Those with technical backgrounds are more qualified to make judgments and appropriate the necessary funds for infrastructure and improvement projects than are non-trained individuals.

As more information on the circumstances and causes surrounding the collapse become known, NSPE will continue to encourage legislative and regulatory action that could prevent future tragedies.

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