Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 65-7

Subject: Engineers' Creed-Use in Political Advertisement
Section 3-Code of Ethics; Section 3(d) - Code of Ethics

Facts:
Supporters of John Doe, P.E., a candidate for election to the city council (a salaried office), with his knowledge and consent inserted a political advertisement in daily newspapers in his community, containing a reproduction of the Engineers' Creed, his picture, and the following text:

> "John Doe, P.E.*, has followed this creed as an engineer and as a citizen, and we know he will be a credit to our community and profession. We ask your earnest consideration of his candidacy for the city council.
>
> "*P.E. Professional Engineer, Registered in the state of _____"

The advertisement listed the names of 20 persons, who were not identified as PE's, or otherwise, but who are, in fact, all registered engineers in the state. The advertisement was clearly identified as a paid political advertisement.

Questions:
1. Is it ethical to use a reproduction of the Engineers' Creed in a paid political advertisement on behalf of a professional engineer?

2. Is the text of the advertisement ethical?

References:
Code of Ethics-Section 3-"The Engineer will not advertise his work or merit in a self-laudatory manner, and will avoid all conduct or practice likely to discredit or unfavorably reflect upon the dignity or honor of the profession."

Section 3(d)-"He will not use his professional affiliations or public office to secure personal ad vantage and will avoid any act tending to promote his own interest at the expense of the dignity and standing of the profession."

Discussion:
In a previous related case involving the reproduction of a professional engineer's seal in a political advertisement (Case No. 61-1), it was held that the text of the advertisement was not unethical, but that the use of the seal was inappropriate. Two members of the Board dissented on the holding that the text of the advertisement was not unethical, citing Case 59-1 as enunciating the standard to be followed. Case No. 59-1, however, dealt with commercial advertisements and held that certain statements in the texts were

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unethical. We consider the use of the Engineers' Creed and the text of the advertisement separately:

Engineers' Creed-The use of the engineer's seal in Case No. 61-1 was objected to, in part, because it is "an official mark authorized by the state for the express purpose of impressing it upon engineering drawings, specifications, plans, and reports prepared by the professional engineer. Its use beyond that purpose converts it into a promotional device in a way not contemplated or authorized by the legislature."

These considerations do not apply to the use of the Engineers' Creed in a political advertisement. The Engineers' Creed is a document prepared and adopted by NSPE to express a philosophy of professional dedication. It carries with it no implication of legal sanction and its use is voluntary. We do not consider that the use of the Engineers' Creed in a political advertisement will reflect unfavorably upon the profession. Rather, we believe that the use of the Engineers' Creed in a dignified manner, and in the context of a circumspect political advertisement will serve to inform the public of the principles which guide the engineer in his service to the public welfare.

Text-The text is a statement of opinion by the sponsors of the advertisement on behalf of the candidate. We can see no objection to engineers as a group, or jointly with others, expressing their political views through a paid advertisement. They have this right as would any other citizens and such action would be objectionable only if the statement was couched in inflammatory or undignified language. In such a case the statement would reflect discredit on the engineering profession. That is not the case here.

Conclusions:
1. It is ethical to use a reproduction of the Engineers' Creed in a paid political advertisement on behalf of a professional engineer under the circumstances cited above.

2. The text of the advertisement is ethical.

Board of Ethical Review: T. C. COOKE, P.E. L. R. DURKEE, P.E. A. C. KIRKWOOD, P.E. WALDEMAR S. NELSON, P.E. KURT F. WENDT, P.E. PHIL T. ELLIOTT, P.E., Chairman

Member Saulter considers the use of the Engineers' Creed in a political advertisement improper because it tends to demean and commercialize the Creed. Such use of the Creed becomes even more objectionable if the sponsors of the advertisement are not identified as professional engineers.

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