County To Hire Staff PE

The Harrison County Commission voted 2-1 to hire an on-staff engineer, who is required to hold a West Virginia PE license, reports the Exponent Telegram. The commissioners who supported the new position believe the move will help the county save money. Commissioner Patsy Trecost say the engineer could assist with projects such as courthouse remodeling, removal of the courthouse jail annex, new roofing at the Public Safety Building in Nutter Fort, the law enforcement headquarters and storage facility in downtown Clarksburg and work at the Harrison County Senior Citizens Center. The salary range begins at $77,000.

Study: While Natural Gas Boomed, Local Economies Didn’t

Despite the natural gas boom, the top gas-producing counties in the Ohio Valley still lag behind the rest of the nation economically, according to a study by the nonprofit think tank Ohio River Valley Institute. The study covers 22 Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia counties that produce more than 90% of the region’s natural gas.

The Charleston Gazette-Mail reported on the study. “What we’re seeing is almost the definition of the resource curse, and that is great economic growth with very little, if any, impact on local measures of prosperity,” Sean O’Leary, senior researcher at the institute, said of the report during a webinar last week that focused on the so-far unrealized dream of a petrochemical boom in Appalachia.

Stay up to date on legislative issues through the NSPE Advocacy Center.

New Report: Valuing Professional Licensing

For years, professional associations and regulatory boards lacked hard data that
demonstrated the value of licensing. In 2020, the Alliance for Responsible Professional Licensing (ARPL) sought to fill that information gap by commissioning Oxford Economics to help better understand the nuanced impacts of licensing on professions and trade and vocational occupations. NSPE is a founding member of ARPL.

The report *Valuing Professional Licensing in the United States*, includes several key findings:

- Across all professions and occupations, licensing is associated with a 6.5% average increase in hourly earnings, even after accounting for the job holder’s educational attainment, gender, and racial demographics.

- Among professionals in technical fields requiring significant education and training, a license narrows the gender-driven wage gap by about one third and the race-driven wage gap by about half.

- Those in trade and vocational occupations can expect a 7.1% hourly wage increase after becoming licensed, while those in a profession requiring advanced education and training can expect a 3.6% wage increase after becoming licensed.

ARPL will host a live webinar on February 24, 2021 (3:00 p.m. eastern standard time) to review findings and conclusions of the report and share new strategies for lawmaker outreach. Register now.

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**Licensing Reform Must Prioritize Public Safety, Says NSPE President**

NSPE President Tricia Hatley has once again made the case for keeping public health, welfare, and safety at the forefront of efforts to reform occupational licensure and increase mobility.

In a recent column directed to state and local government leaders, Hatley warns of the risks of implementing one-size-fits-all universal licensure proposals that do not maintain necessary education and experience standards.

*Most people agree professionals should be allowed to move across state lines and earn a living with the least cost and hassle possible. Likewise, most people want to protect the public’s health, safety and welfare by ensuring they are being served by qualified professionals who have the knowledge, skills and experience for the job. This is especially true in highly technical, high-impact professions that the Alliance for Responsible Professional Licensing represents like certified public accountants, architects, engineers, surveyors and landscape architects.*
Here comes the rub: many of the universal licensing proposals being pitched to state lawmakers, including those put forth by the American Legislative Exchange Council and in Arizona, tend to focus exclusively on the first point—improving mobility—while disregarding the second—ensuring standards necessary to protect the public.

In other words, universal licensing mandates don’t consider the critical importance of substantially equivalent requirements between states. Instead, they dictate that states must accept a license issued by any state without regard for, understanding of, or any input in, the underlying minimum competency requirements behind the license.

Read the full op-ed column.

**PEs Can Strengthen Autonomous Vehicle Safety**

NSPE is calling on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to rely on the expertise of professional engineers and follow recommendations in the Society’s Autonomous Vehicle Policy Guide as part of the federal safety frame work for automated driving systems.

In recent public comments, NSPE President Tricia Hatley informed the agency that NSPE is committed to creating a world where the public can be confident that engineering decisions affecting their lives are made by qualified and ethically accountable professionals. NSPE Position Statement No. 03-1772 states that the testing and deployment of AVs must include a professional engineer. The rationale for the position is rooted in a professional engineer’s ethical obligation to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

The Society also recommends that the NHTSA implement a third-party verification process. A third-party verification process should establish that the ADS technology under review meets a minimal level of safety, as determined by an assessment of risk. This can be done through the submittal of risk assessments audited by a professional engineer who is in responsible charge of the third-party verification process.