IEEE President-Elect Candidates Address Computer Society Concerns

As the largest IEEE society, the Computer Society serves computing and IT professionals within IEEE and its network of more than 426,000 members in 160 countries. Future decisions made by the IEEE president and Board of Directors impact the Computer Society and its members/volunteers. Therefore, to better inform Computer Society members for the upcoming 2017 IEEE presidential election, the Computer Society asked each of the IEEE president-elect candidates for their responses to three important questions that impact the Computer Society.

The questions and IEEE president-elect candidates’ responses (limited to 150 words each) are provided below.

We hope that this information will help you make your decision for the IEEE annual election, which begins on 17 August 2015 and ends on 1 October 2015 (1:00 EDT USA/15:00 UTC time). We encourage all members to participate in this important ballot process.

We also remind and encourage you to cast your vote for Computer Society leaders by noon EDT on 5 October 2015 in the IEEE Computer Society election.

Roger U. Fujii
IEEE Computer Society
President-Elect

IEEE PRESIDENT-ELECT CANDIDATES

KAREN BARTLESON
Karen Bartleson is Senior Director at Synopsys, responsible for technical standards development, software tool interoperability, and relationships with universities and research institutions worldwide. Karen was 2013–2014 IEEE Standards Association President, leading its new strategic plan, furthering the OpenStand standardization paradigm, and finalizing IEEE’s membership in the Global Standards Collaboration. She chaired IEEE’s Internet Initiative for Internet governance, cybersecurity, and cyber-privacy policy. She was a member of IEEE’s Strategy Committee, overseeing the role of IEEE in global public policy. She received the 2003 Women in Electronic Design Automation Achievement Award and authored The Ten Commandments for Effective Standards: Practical Insights for Creating Technical Standards. She received a BS in engineering science from California Polytechnic State University.

FRED MINTZER
Fred Mintzer received a PhD in EECS from Princeton University and joined IBM’s Watson Research Center in 1978. Beginning in the mid-1980s, he led teams that developed image database technologies for projects with cultural institutions that included the Vatican Library, Russia’s Hermitage Museum, and Cairo’s Egyptian Museum. From 2005 until retirement in 2013, he was the program director for IBM’s Blue Gene Watson Supercomputer Center. He has produced over 25 patents and 50 publications and was recognized as a member of the IBM Academy of Technology. He is an IEEE Fellow, a member of the IEEE Computer Society, a past President of the IEEE Signal Processing Society, and a past VP of IEEE Technical Activities.
PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The IEEE Board of Directors approved a motion at the June Board meeting to rescind a prior BOD motion to include the proposed constitutional amendments on this year’s ballot. However, these changes are being discussed by an IEEE ad hoc committee, and their recommendations could result in these same issues being submitted to the IEEE membership during the tenure of the current IEEE president-elect candidates, so it is important that our membership hear the candidate’s positions on the proposed constitutional changes.

QUESTION 1

Currently the IEEE members vote to select the regional and division directors to serve on the Board of Directors (BOD). Also, the IEEE members vote to approve any governance rules and procedures that are currently in the constitution. There are two major changes contained in the proposed constitutional changes. First, the IEEE members would vote to select only a portion of the directors on the BOD, with the remaining Board members to be selected by the Board itself. Second, many of the current constitutional governance rules and procedures are being proposed to be moved to the bylaws, where changes to the governance rules and procedures requires only a majority of the Board vote and do not require IEEE members’ vote and concurrence. What is your opinion of the proposed constitutional changes being discussed?

COMPUTER SOCIETY POSITION

Constitutional changes proposed diminish membership’s role in selecting its Board, decision-making, and approving governance changes. Our concerns are as follows:

i. Placing these policies in the bylaws means that—on important issues such as the number of Board members, number of regional and division Board members, and Board voting rights—a small group of Board members can make changes without voting-member concurrence.

ii. Reducing the number of member-elected Board members allows the majority of the Board to be handpicked by the Board and not reflective of voting members.

iii. Allowing appointed IEEE officers (Board-appointed officers and IEEE senior staff positions such as the executive director, etc.) to be voting Board members is contrary to the statement that IEEE is a volunteer-led nonprofit organization.

iv. Removing IEEE operational oversight from the Board’s responsibilities changes its fiduciary responsibility. Currently, the Board ensures that IEEE operations satisfy voting members and volunteer needs.

Bartleson

IEEE’s constitution is reviewed periodically to ensure viability in light of changes within IEEE, legal frameworks, modern organizational practices, and throughout industry, academia, and government. Our constitution was last amended in December 2004. For the past couple of years, IEEE’s Board of Directors discussed the constitution with the goal to keep it robust and contemporary. Proposed changes were prepared to send to the IEEE membership for approval. However, “At its meeting on 21 June [2015], the IEEE Board of Directors approved a motion to withdraw the constitutional amendment from the 2015 Annual Election Ballot and therefore not present changes to the members for consideration at this time.” Because it is unclear what future changes may be proposed, I think it is not pertinent to give an opinion on changes that were suggested previously. Going forward, I will support the work of the Board and whatever its collective decision will be.

Mintzer

At its meeting on 21 June, the IEEE Board of Directors wisely approved a motion “to withdraw the Constitutional Amendment from the 2015 Annual Election Ballot and therefore not present changes to the members for consideration at this time.”

It is important that our governance contain appropriate safeguards so that IEEE will continue to be responsive to its mission, its core values, and the interests of its members.

Some important provisions of the IEEE constitution describe the basic composition of the IEEE Board of Directors and who shall elect them; to change these provisions currently requires approval by the voting members. The proposed constitutional amendment would move those matters to the bylaws, where they could be changed without approval by the voting members. I consider membership approval of these matters to be an important safeguard—and necessary for my support of any potential constitutional amendment.
Bartleson

IEEE is not only a professional organization, but also a business, albeit not-for-profit. Like any business we continually work to increase revenue while managing expenses. Our finances are complex as we have six major operational units, 40+ technical societies and councils, and 10 geographical regions encompassing numerous countries and governments. It is the Board of Directors’ responsibility to be knowledgeable about IEEE’s financial state. To me, “financial transparency” means presenting financial operations in ways that the Board can readily understand them. The Board can then make informed and appropriate financial decisions. A business cannot let indirect and administrative expenses increase to become unbalanced with income. Yet as a business grows, increases in expenses may be vital to support growth. Currently, IEEE has a committee working on enhancing financial management. This work, which I fully support, will be brought to bear on keeping the Board educated and safeguarding IEEE’s financial health.

Mintzer

Financial transparency is very important as it enables IEEE decision makers to better know the financial consequences of their decisions—when those decisions are made. Furthermore, greater financial transparency is important to provide a better understanding of the root causes of the growth of IEEE infrastructure expenses—so that the contributing expenditures can be identified and infrastructure expenses can be better controlled.

The IEEE CFO has been a necessary and willing participant in multiple efforts aimed at increasing IEEE financial transparency. I would encourage him to continue his efforts to work with our senior leaders to improve IEEE financial transparency about important financial topics—including infrastructure expenses.

The IEEE executive director, who is responsible for all IEEE operations, recognizes the importance of financial transparency. I believe greater financial transparency is sufficiently important that it should be included in the executive director’s annual goals—and I would encourage that.

COMPUTER SOCIETY POSITION

The financial transparency inquiry, initiated by a committee comprising IEEE Societies’ presidents, revealed the first level of detailed financial transparency in administrative and indirect costs assessed against Societies’ revenues. In particular, the IEEE CFO’s latest report shows growth over 51 percent for administrative and indirect expenses in the past 5 years. This is far greater than Societies’ revenue growth in the same period.

IEEE administrative and indirect expenses are a difficult burden on all Societies’ net operating revenues. More detailed disclosures of these costs will help pinpoint where controls and reductions should be applied. Without this increasingly detailed financial transparency, accurate and timely decisions on Society budgets are difficult to accomplish. It is imperative that the IEEE president supports this transparency initiative and directs IEEE financial staff to produce the required financial details needed so Societies can make sound business decisions for the future.

QUESTION 2

There has been significant dialogue within the Board of Directors about better financial transparency and the growth of IEEE indirect and administrative expenses (as reported by the chief financial officer). What are your thoughts on achieving better financial transparency and what steps would you recommend for containing the IEEE indirect and administrative expense growth?
QUESTION 3
The IEEE societies, councils, and operating units produce many outstanding products and services such as our world-class magazines and transactions. However, to remain relevant to our members and volunteers, what new products or services would you recommend that we pursue going into the future?

COMPUTER SOCIETY POSITION
All Society volunteers have worked hard to produce new and innovative products and services. However, Societies find it increasingly difficult to fund these new product and service initiatives as each Society’s new initiative funds have been adversely impacted by the growth of IEEE administrative and indirect expenses. The IEEE president should support the allocation of IEEE reserve funds to be directed to IEEE Societies so that they can continue to develop new products and services that will better serve members and produce additional surpluses for the IEEE.

Bartleson
In practically every conversation I get involved in about IEEE remaining relevant, two themes emerge. First, we should become closer to industry. Second, we must appeal to our young professionals. We live in an age of information. One of IEEE’s greatest assets is the knowledge that our members and volunteers provide through IEEE’s Xplore digital library. With Xplore’s approximately four million plus documents, it becomes more and more difficult for researchers and industry professionals to parse all this information. IEEE could provide a new product or service that would use powerful knowledge aggregation technology to bring an even higher level of intelligence to industry and our future technologists. We can leverage state-of-the-art communication tools to provide global interaction among experts and novices—virtual conferences, for instance. We should continue growing our portfolio of standards, which enable emerging technologies such as smart grid, eHealth, smart cities, and the Internet of Things.

Mintzer
We should begin by looking at the needs of members—by career track.

Many IEEE offerings serve members employed in academic or research career tracks. One of the problems these members encounter is maintaining awareness of new research—specifically related to their individual research interests. Analytics products that help them to better do this should be pursued.

There are other member career tracks that are not as well served. These include practicing tech professionals, consultants, and entrepreneurs. We should target offerings to larger groups of members with common career-related needs—such as software professionals. These offerings might include a suite of practicing tech professional–oriented publications [e.g., magazines], field-specific tutorial materials [e.g., MOOCs and webinars], certifications, and opportunities to interact with other skilled professionals in their field [e.g., as members of a targeted community supported by IEEE’s forthcoming networking and collaboration tool].