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**OCTOBER MEETING: 2<sup>ND</sup> VLS SUMMER INTERN AND CO-OP PRESENTATION COMPETITION FINALISTS**

[WEBEX MEETING NUMBER 635 888 409](#) (further directions on page 9)

**THURSDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2016**

**9:00 pm EDT, 8:00 pm CDT, 7:00 pm MDT, 6:00 pm PDT;**

**UTC/GMT 0100 28 October 2016**

Four student projects have been selected as finalists for live presentations at the October VLS meeting as part of the Second VLS Summer Intern and Co-op Presentation Competition. The four projects are Tanishq Pathak (University, Vellore, TN, India – Software Development for Pressure Relief Valves at Honeywell UOP); the team of Clayton Brandenburg and Michelle Luther (University of South Carolina and Auburn University – Experimental Studies to Minimize hexamethyldisiloxane (HMDSO) Production in Waste Processing at Savannah River National Lab); Muhammad Zaqwan bin Abu Zaki (Universiti Teknologi Mara – Quality Assurance at Toyoplas Manufacturing Malaysia) and Daniel S. Candler (Louisiana State University – Improving the Compressed Air System for the San Gabriel Production Facility of Syngenta Crop Protection)

Presentations will be a maximum of 10 minutes each, and will be judged by practicing chemical engineers.

## IN THIS ISSUE

Controversy about the proposed AIChE constitutional amendments is generating civil discussion among members on AIChE Engage, in other forums, and here in these pages. Since this is such a timely matter, (the voting has just begun) and so many of my regular contributors chose to write their opinions, I decided to dedicate this issue to those opinions. I hope you read and consider the interesting and varied viewpoints before you cast your votes.

First, John O'Connell, who last month presented the proposed amendments for the VLS webinar, presents the case for voting for all the amendments.

Our present and past chairs, who each have different reasons for reaching their conclusions, discuss the controversial amendments, particularly the proposed six-fold increase in signatures for petition candidacies.

My curiosity aroused by the supposition that social media makes 600 signatures easy, I give a quick data analysis of my own social media connections to predict how hard it would be for my social media connections or me to gather 600 signatures, should we want to petition.

Then Neil Yeoman, one of the two people who used the Petition Candidacy in the last 50 years, talks about the opportunities petition candidacy gave to him.

---- Jennifer I. Brand

## THE CASE FOR THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

John O'Connell



The case to vote in favor of the amendments from AIChE leadership is at: [www.iche.org/amendments](http://www.iche.org/amendments). All changes can be viewed in the full marked-up

Constitution text found

at: [www.iche.org/sites/default/files/docs/pages/proposedconstitutionchanges.pdf](http://www.iche.org/sites/default/files/docs/pages/proposedconstitutionchanges.pdf).

The amendments are given in 5 different categories; one can vote yes for all, or vote yes or no for each category individually. Category 4 involves amending the language of only Section 2(a) of Article 5 (~~red is removed~~; ~~green is inserted~~) "(a) The Board of Directors shall appoint a Nominating Committee . . . The Nominating Committee shall include on the election ballot the name of any qualified Fellow, Senior Member, or 4-year Member whose nomination for President-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, or Director (but not President) is supported in writing by ~~100 or more Fellows, Senior Members, or Members, filed with the Office of the Secretary not later than 25 weeks prior to the Annual Meeting, and who has agreed to serve~~ 2% of the voting membership. [C4]".

This change can be voted on separately from the others.

The discussion provided on the AIChE website for C4 says the purpose is “Recognizing the Ways Technology Impacts Petition Candidacies” by increasing “the small number of members (100) required to establish a petition candidacy for the Board or to serve as an Officer. When this provision was originally adopted, petitions were circulated in hardcopy and required considerable face-to-face interaction. In today’s networked world, with signatures gathered electronically, aided by social media and mass emails, demonstrating a meaningful threshold of support and a candidate’s commitment to service raises the bar for signatures.”

The intention is not to eliminate the possibility of petition candidates, but rather to elevate the initiative to a level commensurate with current and future capability of soliciting support through blanket e-mails from an individual’s contact list and via social media such as LinkedIn. It is recognized that even a few years ago, developing petition candidates was extremely difficult and time-consuming to carry out manually. Times have changed; in recent elections, some candidates have been able to send out large numbers of emails about their qualifications.

The level of support being suggested is viewed as not very onerous, especially since electronic signatures are allowed, while also showing enough support and commitment to indicate a viable candidacy. The current number of members means that about 600 supportive communications would need to be supplied by the candidate. This minimum

number of signatures is the same as that for proposing an amendment to the Constitution.

## **FROM THE CHAIR: CONTROVERSY IN THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**

### **Experience Nduagu**



At the September VLS meeting, Dr. John O’Connell presented the proposed AIChE constitutional amendments. Ballots have been mailed out and electronic voting has begun.

The reason given for amending was that the constitution hasn’t been amended since 2003. For example, we are told that recent changes in New York regulations for non-profit organizations require NPOs to have a procedure for dissolution. You can download the proposed constitutional amendment document with the proposed changes highlighted at <http://www.aiche.org/sites/default/files/docs/pages/proposedconstitutionchanges.pdf>

However, opinions vary among members and two amendments, in particular, are causing true controversy. I, personally, find them contradictory in spirit and logic. *It is my opinion that these two amendments should be rejected.*

Let me explain. The two amendments in question address 1) the problem of declining levels of voter participation in AIChE elections by reducing the required number of votes to change the constitution from 75% of the voters in an election where at least 20% eligible voters vote to a mere two-thirds (2/3) of those voting in the election, no matter how few voters actually vote and 2) a proposal increasing the number of signatures necessary for the rare events of Petition Candidacy from 100 member signature to the signatures of 2% of membership.

Questions about consistency come to mind: “why should the voters needed to pass important measures be watered down so much while the requirement for the Petition Candidacy is made so much more stringent?” or “Isn’t logical to think that the declining voter interest experienced by the AIChE as an institution will also be a challenge for the Petition Candidates?”

I've listened to the rationale for proposing to increase the Petition Candidacy required votes from 100 eligible members to 2% of the voting membership. The major argument for that proposal is that the use of social media has changed the way we communicate and that it is now very easy to use social media platforms to garner 100 signatures in support of a Petition Candidate. I agree that social media has changed the way we communicate. However, I argue that if social media helps Petition Candidates easily get the required votes, why do we think that the same social media platforms would not help AIChE as an

institution to increase voter interest and responsiveness through social media engagements? One may think that what is good for the goose is also good for the gander. That may not be true in this case? I am yet to see good reasons for this.

In my opinion, if both amendments are not rejected outright, then there are two solutions to these controversial and contradictory proposed amendments. These are:

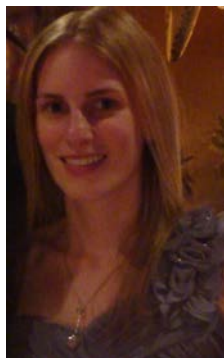
If we accept the proposed changes to eliminate the 20% AIChE’s eligible voter requirement, it is sensible to reject the proposed increase in the number of signatories for a Petition Candidate.

If we accept proposed increase in the number of signatories for a Petition Candidate, we must, on the other hand, reject the proposed changes to eliminate the 20% AIChE’s eligible voter requirement.

Option one may be the best because it loosens restrictions for AIChE as well as for the rare Petition Candidates.

## **FROM THE PAST CHAIR: A MILLENNIAL’S VIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND PETITIONING**

**Amanda Scalza**



How many restaurant or hotel reviews have you read and how many have you posted on the internet? How many times have you read posts on AIChE Engage,

and how many responses have you written? Closer to home, how many of us passively join our professional organizations, but do not actively participate? The reality is, very few of us will actively participate in activities, no matter how easy the internet has made it, unless we feel especially passionate about the subject. I myself admit I am more passive than active in my internet activity, even though my status as a “millennial” would make it seem less so. For this reason, I feel requiring 600 signatures, instead of 100, to petition to be on the AIChE ballot, is an unreasonably high hurdle.

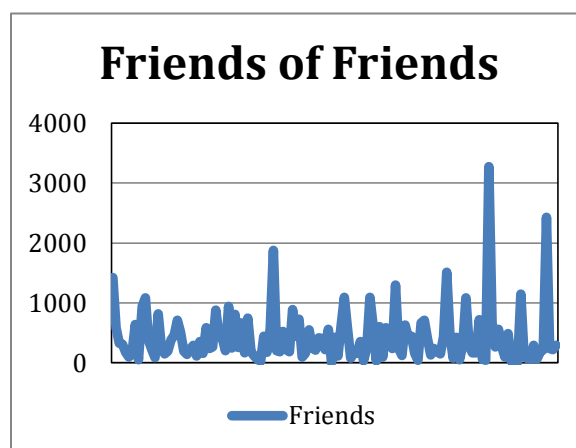
The average participation rate on an internet community is about 1%. For the Virtual Local Section, a paid membership community, we average 5% in live participation at our meetings and an additional 5-10% in viewers of the archived videos. An educated assumption would say at least 3,000 connections with eligible signers (members of AIChE), personal or electronic, would need to be made in order to obtain 600 signatures.

Six hundred signatures for participation in the ballot is a hurdle that would likely be prohibitive for a large swath of AIChE members. Locations internationally where AIChE is not as established, or competing with alternative professional organizations, may have a difficult time finding sufficient AIChE members to sign for them. Since of AIChE’s goals has been to reach out internationally and increase diversity, I see this amendment as new hurdle to this mission rather than support for it.

Additionally, we could lose the valuable leadership skills of members who have more active locally, and therefore have a smaller group to gather signatures. Older members who may have a large network but spend less time rebuilding connections on the internet, and younger members who are just building their networks could have also a difficult time collecting 600 signatures.

After inquiring more about the history of the petition, I learned that this option is rarely used. I agree with the notion that people who are looking to utilize this option must be very passionate about the institute, and have realized during my time with volunteer organizations that it is almost never beneficial to create barriers for volunteers. For these reasons, I will not support the petition to increase the signature requirement for ballot petitions.

### A QUICK DATA BREAK Jennifer Brand



Does social media really make it easy to get 600 signatures for a petition candidacy? I

decided to exploit some personal data to try to get a more objective answer to this question.

I have about 170 “friends” on each of my two main social media sites. These “friends” come from many backgrounds, with a wide geographic distribution, a wide age range (spanning 8 decades), and varied reasons for being connected to me. Probably fewer than 10% are AIChE members, so most of my social media connections would not be eligible to sign an AIChE petition for me.

For a more meaningful sample, I decided to expand the sample size from  $n = 1$ . So I looked at the number of “friends” my connections on Facebook had. Some had privacy settings hiding their actual number of “friends”, so, in the end, my sample size for “Friends of Friends” was 139. I have plotted a rough sketch of the distribution of these “friend” numbers above. As you can see, it is not an even distribution. The descriptive stats for the “friends of friends” sample are:

max = 3273; min = 13; mean = 421; standard deviation = 447; mode = 242; and median = 263. Only 11 “friends” had more than 1000 friends, and all 11 were in some way professional public performers.

My conclusion: even among my “friends”, getting 600 qualified signatures from social media for a professional society petition would be hard if not impossible.

## THE WORLD OUT THERE: SERVICE TO AIChE

**Neil Yeoman**



As one of only two people who have been successful petition candidates elected to the AIChE Board of Directors (BOD) in at

least the last half-century I feel obligated to voice my objections to a proposed constitutional amendment that would effectively eliminate the petition candidate option.

The petition option to seek a position on the AIChE BOD is an important one. The Nominating Committee (on which I served three times) is composed of about 15 people chosen by the president for their service at the Institute level. They all know most of each other and pretty much the same other people because of shared experiences in service at the Institute level. They are extremely unlikely to ever nominate people whose service has been at only the division and/or local section level and they very rarely do. But there are a great many people who have done terrific work at the local section and/or division level who are highly qualified to serve on the BOD and very deserving of the opportunity, an opportunity which the petition option provides. There are also usually many qualified and deserving people who have served at the Institute



level who, without the petition option, are effectively barred from serving because they do not know enough of the people on the Nominating Committee. The petition option is one which, in my opinion, should be used much more often than it has in the past. To even try to make it more difficult is a move in the wrong direction. To effectively eliminate it with unreasonable requirements is undemocratic.

We are told that the proposed change from 100 signatures to about 600 (2% of the voting membership) is reasonable but one need only look at the numbers to see that it is not. Knowledgeable people tell us that it is rare for any person active in an organization to have more than 200 personal friends in that organization regardless of whether they are names in an e-mail address book or social media contacts, or how many of either or both a person has. That the existence of the social media will change that number has been debunked. None of the social media users that I have contacted who are AIChE members have anywhere near enough other AIChE members as Facebook friends or the equivalent to come anywhere near getting even a modest fraction of the 600 signatures the change would require. Of those no more than ~200 personal friends who are AIChE members a potential candidate might have a response rate of about 1/3 can be expected if they are asked to do something for which they receive no personal benefit and is not of an "emergency" nature, so only about 70 responses can be expected from those

people. If the request is not only to sign a petition but to get others to do so also experience suggests that those 70 responses will produce about 140 signatures. The other 460 signatures must come from AIChE voting members who are effectively strangers even if a few of them are in one's e-mail address book or are social media contacts. Since it is against AIChE policy to use any AIChE generated list for any election purpose the only way to contact the vast majority of those other people and send them a petition to sign is one at a time primarily via AIChE Engage. Given that we do not have a list of the names of these people (except for the tiny fraction in our e-mail address books or as social media contacts) making those contacts has been estimated to take at least 50 hours per 1000 names. Somebody working seven hours a day every day for at least seven months could possibly try to contact every voting member of AIChE. But since only about 85% of AIChE members have valid e-mail addresses in the AIChE database no more than about 26,000 could actually be contacted. Those knowledgeable tell us that responses from strangers, however they are contacted, for this kind of thing would never be expected to exceed one percent, so, at the outside, no more than 260 responses could be expected by a more than seven month full time attempt to contact every professional member of AIChE. If 2/3 of those responses were positive, a very optimistic projection, that seven months full time effort to contact every single professional member

of AIChE not a personal friend of the potential nominee would probably yield no more than about 180 additional signatures. A maximum effort of this kind, an unreasonable level of effort, would be predicted to gather a total of about 320 signatures, about half of what would be required by the proposed change. This is consistent with my experience. It took me three and half months to get 120 signatures (the 100 needed plus 20 extra in case some of the first 100 were invalid) when I ran for office in 2004. I actually went through the process twice. In 2011 I decided to seek the position of AIChE Secretary in order to continue to best serve the Institute. Here, again, it took me about 3.5 months to get 120 signatures. For reasons outside the scope of this message I chose not to run at that time and withdrew the petition shortly after it was filed in early 2012.

The only other person who ran as a petition candidate in anybody's memory was Dave Rosenthal in 2010. I checked with him and his experience was similar to mine.

Changing the petition candidacy requirements as proposed will effectively eliminate the option. Since it is an option that is now very rarely used (probably no more than three times in the last half century) trying to eliminate it (or just make it more difficult) makes no sense. Needless to say I am voting against that change to the AIChE Constitution.

It is claimed that 600 signatures is appropriate to make the candidacy more representative. How is 100 people nominating a single candidate less

representative than the ~15 person Nominating Committee, all of whom are appointed by a single person, nominating ten or twelve people most of whom most of the committee members all probably personally know? From every reasonable point of view, AIChE is far better off with the current requirements than with the proposed requirements that effectively eliminate the petition option.

In early 2003 AIChE announced that it was in financial trouble. The situation described was hard to believe, one which could not have happened if AIChE were run like the industrial organizations with which I was familiar. At that time my sole service to AIChE was 13 years as treasurer of the Separations Division, one of AIChE's most financially strong entities. I decided that I needed to get involved and I asked a friend to offer my name to the AIChE Nominating Committee to get it on the ballot for the elections to be held in 2004 for a director position for the period 1/1/2005 to 12/31/2007. The committee chose eight other people and, without knowing who those eight people were, and expecting them to have been chosen from the pool of people who had let AIChE go to the brink of financial disaster, I decided to run as a petition candidate. I contacted everybody in my e-mail address book, and beyond, seeking the needed 100 signatures. It took about three and a half months to get the needed signatures (with about twenty extra, just in case); I filed the petitions; I got on the ballot; I came in 4th in a field of nine; and I took my seat on the BOD on 1/1/2005.



Being on the BOD was the start of an opportunity to serve AIChE at a much higher level and with a much greater intensity than was possible as a division officer. I was well positioned to do so. I was retired and I had worked in industrial leadership and management positions for most of my 44 year somewhat varied career as a chemical engineer. Based on what I did on the BOD from 2005 through 2007 I was nominated by the Nominating Committee to be a candidate for director for the period 2009-2011, the first time somebody had been nominated for a second full term on the BOD in anybody's memory. I was elected to and served that second term as a director. Rather than go into any further detail on my service to AIChE it can be summarized for the period ending in 2013 by noting that in 2013 I received the Van

Antwerpen Award for service to the Institute. Since then I have continued to serve at about the same level of intensity. All this Institute level activity has given me a great deal of satisfaction and has produced some positive changes to AIChE. *None of it would have happened had not the petition candidate option been available to me in 2004.* I will never use that option again (another story for another time) but I want others to have that option, so I am both saddened and disturbed that that option may soon not be available. *To keep this option available for others, I am hoping that the proposed amendment to change the requirements will not be approved.*

## ATTENDING A VLS MEETING

- **Join by internet:**
  - <https://aiche.webex.com/mw3000/mywebex/default.do?siteurl=aiche>
  - Search for VLS or by meeting number 635 888 409 (March) 634 167 017 (April)
- **Join by phone:** Access code: 634 167 017
  - 1-866-469-3239 Call-in toll-free number (US/Canada)
  - 1-650-429-3300 Call-in toll number (US/Canada)
  - [Global Call-in numbers](#)
  - [Toll-free calling restrictions](#)

*Attendance at a Virtual Local Section Meeting is open to AIChE Virtual Local Section Members, AIChE members, and other interested people.*

*The statements and opinions in this newsletter reflect the views of the contributors, not of the AIChE or the VLS, neither of which assume responsibility for them.*

## **PDH CREDIT FOR VLS MEETINGS**

**LAURA J. GIMPELSON, P. E.**

Attendees of the Virtual Local Section Meetings can receive up to 1 hour of professional development credit that meets the continuing education requirements of most state professional engineering registrations. To receive the certificate documenting your attendance, send an email to the VLS secretary, Laura Gimpelson, at [virtualaiche@gmail.com](mailto:virtualaiche@gmail.com).

Include the following information in your email:

1. Name of the Presentation and Speaker
2. Attendee's name as listed on the registration certificate
2. Attendee's registration number and state/providence of issuance

The certificate, in pdf format, will be issued within 30 days of the receipt of the request.