

A Question of Risk

By

Excerpt from a transcript of the January 29, 2037 meeting of the Society of Actuaries admissions committee:

Chairman Davis: Now, we have the application of John Hazard, which is a bit unusual...

Member Novalny: I protest this so-called "application," which is anything but...

Chairman Davis: Mr. Novalny, you are out of order...

Member Novalny: ...rather it's a blatant attempt by...

(Chairman bangs gavel)

Chairman Davis: Please, please, order. Order!

Member Riskoff: Ms. Chairman?

Chairman Davis: Yes?

Member Riskoff: Could we adjourn and continue off-the-record?

Member Novalny: I object! I object. Any discussions of this matter must be public!

Chairman Davis: We are going off-the-record. Now, Steve, what is all this malarkey?

Member Novalny: This is bull...

Chairman Davis: Come on, Steve. Hazard got 10s on ALL his exams. What is the problem here?

Member Novalny: Of course, he did! If I can call "it" a "he!"

Chairman Davis: Please, let's stick to the facts and not impressions. You know our motto...

Member Riskoff: May I speak?

(Chairman nods)

Member Riskoff: Steve, everybody knows why you're objecting. PC&VD has been trying to stop this application ever since...

Member Novalny: Margery, I resent your insinuation, and if it weren't for the fact that John works for Metro-Gibraltar, you'd be objecting too. The Met is trying to put the rest of us out of business, and that's all this is about and you know it!

Member Riskoff: Not at all. We invested in John, and now that he's passed the exams, we fully expect the Society to live up to its...

Member Novalny: He should never have been allowed to take the exams. Besides, he is "morally unfit." There can hardly be any question about that.

Member Riskoff: I deny that completely. There is absolutely no evidence that...

Member Novalny: How could he be otherwise? He has no conscience.

Member Riskoff: That's why he's taken all those ethics courses. And he got a 10 on the ethics portion...

Member Novalny: That's baloney and you know it, Marge. Ethics! My...

Chairman Davis: Steve, even if we're off the record, you must remember the courtesy due to members of this committee.

Member Riskoff: You're just worried PC&VD will...

Member Novalny: You think I'm worried about PC&VD? You're crazy!

Chairman Davis: Steve, I'm not going to...

Member Novalny: I'm worried about myself! I'm worried about every real actuary in this country! How long do you think we'll have jobs if this application is approved? How long before Hazard puts every actuary in the country out of work? It took me 10 years to get my Fellowship! John Hazard? Two exam periods! And that's only because some exams are offered once a year! How can anyone compete with that?

Member Riskoff: Well, I took the exams too, Steve. Yes, it took me 5 years to complete...

Chairman Davis: You are out of order. Out of order, Steve.

Member Riskoff: ...but you don't see me whining about a little competition...

Chairman Davis: Marge...

Member Riskoff: You're just scared. Admit it!

Chairman Davis: Marge!

Member Novalny: Yes! I'm scared! I AM scared. We should all be scared. See this? It's a petition signed by 237 Fellows of the Society, demanding John Hazard's application be denied.

Member Riskoff: None of them from my firm...

Member Novalny: Of course not! Metro-Gibraltar doesn't have any actuaries left except you, and you just sign whatever John...

Chairman Davis: Steve, I'm going to have to report your conduct to the ABCD if you don't stop...

Member Novalny: Because this application is 'make-it-or-break-it' for the rest of us REAL actuaries...

Member Riskoff: John IS a real actuary. Or he will be once the Committee acts on his application. He's passed the tests, he's got 3 Fellows who recommend he be admitted and he has the requisite experience...

Member Novalny: This whole thing is rigged. Obviously, you two are going to ram this whole thing down the throats of...

Chairman Davis: That's enough, Steve.

Member Novalny: It's just like *2001*. Remember that? The movie? Hazard is just like Hal.

Member Riskoff: Ms. Chairman, I request we return to on-the-record and take a vote...

Member Novalny: No! I object!

Chairman Davis: So ordered. We are back on the record. Mr. Novalny, can you state your objection as succinctly as possible so we can take a vote and move on?

Member Novalny: John Hazard is not human. He cannot be admitted to the Society. Only living human being can be members of the Society of Actuaries...

Member Riskoff: Where does it say that?

Chairman Davis: Please, Ms. Riskoff, let him finish.

Member Novalny: He's only a gussied-up spreadsheet! A program. Like "Deep Blue." Like "Ju-kyu." Like the UN's population projection program.

Member Riskoff: John Hazard, like all of us, is a heuristic learning system capable of making decisions in real time based on actuarial models and methodology. Every human learns from experience and so does John. By now John has been exposed to hundreds of millions of hypothetical events, and has learned from them. He is far more advanced than any of us here today, respectfully, and deserves to be treated fairly by the Society and not...

Member Novalny: He's NOT HUMAN! He's not human! He doesn't "deserve" a thing. He's just a glorified collection of algorithms. A bunch of lines of code. A scribble on a napkin...

Chairman Davis: So, to summarize, Steve, your primary objection is that the applicant is not a human being?

Member Novalny: That's right.

Chairman Davis: And can you point to anything in the By-laws, or in our Charter, or in any hearing or committee meeting that would support your position?

Member Riskoff: No, he can't! Because there's nothing.

Member Novalny: It's obvious. It goes without saying. Only human beings can be actuaries. Software cannot be a Fellow.

Chairman Davis: All in favor of approving the application of John Hazard for Fellowship in the Society of Actuaries? One against, and two for, I pronounce the application approved.