

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington, D.C.)

The Committee to Restore Integrity to the USOC is calling on the near-complete resignation of the U.S. Olympic Committee board and the senior leadership. The recent [Ropes & Gray investigation](#) and the [Congressional House subcommittee report](#) call for profound cultural changes to the USOC; a re-organization that puts athletes' interests and their well-being first, rather than corporate or employee interests. The athletes' voice in leadership and governance must be a requirement, rather than a PR platitude.

However, this week's appointment of Rich Bender and re-appointment of Steve Mesler to four-year terms on to the USOC Board represents a willful blindness to the cultural and structural changes necessary.

In addition, current Board members did not move to reconsider dangerous USOC policies that the Ropes & Gray and Congressional Reports highlighted; policies that continue to leave athletes vulnerable to abuse and retaliation. Instead, USOC leadership kept repeating that it was Congress' fault; that the Sports Act¹ prevented them from helping athletes, even though that was never true. (See attached legal memo on USOC near-total authority over NGBs under the Sports Act and the USOC bylaws.)

- **Rich Bender** has been associated with the NGB Council for a number of years. During this time Bender aligned himself with Scott Blackmun's insistence on NGB "self-governance"; an identified problematic strategy of ignoring athletes that has led to disastrous results. Similarly imitating [Blackmun's modus operandi](#), Bender intimidated and insulted athlete-leaders that spoke out against the USOC's current culture – and in support of athletes' rights – during a joint session of the Athletes' Advisory Council (AAC) and to the National Governing Body Council (NGBC). Bender's retaliatory conduct is *precisely* the problematic institutional response that Ropes & Gray and the Congressional report highlighted as dangerous. In addition, Bender's fellow NGB Council member, Darrin Steele, faced pointed written questioning from Senator Blumenthal of Connecticut after a subcommittee hearing for playing a similar role in that session. Formal complaints were made about Bender's retaliatory conduct, yet the USOC did not investigate these complaints nor did senior USOC leadership speak to AAC representatives who witnessed his conduct when considering Bender for the USOC Board position. Finally, Rich Bender has been the CEO of USA Wrestling, an NGB that is itself out of compliance with the Sports Act.
- **Steve Mesler** was just re-appointed to another 4-year term, even though he has publicly stated that he does not represent the athletes in his duties as a USOC Board member. Instead, he hides behind a fiduciary responsibility to the organization, one that all Board members have, but members do not consider it a limitation to their work. While in theory there should be no conflict between athlete and corporate interests, in reality their interests frequently conflict. Mostly alarming, Mesler frequently defends the USOC's cultural status quo. In fact, he has asserted that the USOC will always do what is in the athletes' best interest; that cultural changes advocated by the AAC, by the Ropes & Gray report, by and by Congress are unnecessary. Mesler's philosophical and practical positions are inconsistent with his appointment as the ATHLETE REPRESENTATIVE to the board. The AAC was not asked for their feedback in the Board's process to reconfirm Mesler for his second term. This is in direct contradiction to the USOC's new public relations insistence on an "Athletes First" approach.

¹ 36 U.S.C. Sec. 220501 et seq., available at: <https://www.teamusa.org/Footer/Legal/Governance-Documents>

Together, these appointments demonstrate that the board is functioning without regard to the Ropes & Gray Report or to Congressional House Subcommittee Report. Worse, the USOC is still functioning without regard to the interests of its athletes. The athletes, elected by their peers, were not consulted about any of the new appointments as they were being vetted.

While much of the media surrounding the release of the Ropes & Gray report focused on former CEO Scott Blackmun's bold lies to the investigators, (Blackmun did not lift a finger to help either USA Gymnastics or the athletes), Blackmun's actions *without* his lies to Ropes & Gray investigators is actually worse; Blackmun's inaction was standard USOC board policy. Athlete-complaints were to be handled by those inflicting harm on the athlete, their NGB, and, as matter of board policy, athletes were to be ignored by the USOC.

Ropes & Gray described the USOC and USA Gymnastics (USAG) as creating an "ecosystem" that facilitated Larry Nassar's criminal acts; the organization and individuals ignored red flags, failed to recognize textbook grooming behaviors, established no boundaries between adults and children, and dismissed clear calls for help from girls and young women. The USOC "...did not meaningfully involve athletes in decisions or policy-making; nor did it provide an effective avenue for athletes to raise and resolve complaints involving sexual misconduct matters." Yesterday's actions reveal that the USOC is still not including athletes in the most important decisions and policy-making.

Because of the most recent developments, *the Committee to Restore Integrity to the USOC* is making the bold recommendation to remove most of the USOC Board and its Senior Leadership; the USOC does not appear to be able to reform itself. Despite actual knowledge of real athlete-vulnerability of sexual abuse and ongoing retaliation, to our knowledge, no member of the USOC board or senior leadership called for a re-consideration of these dangerous USOC policies prior to Congressional and media involvement, and Board members did not call upon Congress to rectify any barrier that the Sports Act may have imposed. The USOC Board paid more attention to lavish employee compensation and perks than to athlete well-being. All current members of the Board who cannot demonstrate that they opposed the USOC's official "refuse to help athletes" policy should be removed.

Ed Williams, J.D., Olympian, one of the architects of the Sports Act in 1978, and lawyer frequently representing both athletes and NGBs, said, "The Sports Act mandates not only that athletes be represented on the USOC Board but that the athletes' viewpoints be clearly heard. That can only be achieved by the selection of athlete reps to the USOC Board by the Athletes' Advisory Council, and not by the selection of athletes to the Board who the Board believes will best suit its PR purposes. Only when athletes can choose their own representatives to the USOC Board, will the intent of the Sports Act to have athlete representation on the Board be fulfilled."

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, J.D., Olympian and CEO of *Champion Women*, said, "It is disappointing that the USOC still fails to look inward, even after independent reports demonstrate their culpability in failing to help athletes. Their two recent appointments to the Board, without athlete involvement, further demonstrate why they should not be leading America's Olympic movement. The problem remains; we must strengthen athletes' rights against bureaucrats acting with a five-ring-fueled sense of self-importance."

Because the USOC cannot rehabilitate itself, *Team Integrity* calls on Congressional action to re-write the Sports Act. It is shameful that athletes are still struggling to get the protections and representation Congress intended to give them when the Sports Act was first passed in 1978.

Additional members of *Team Integrity* include:

Robert Allard, J.D.	Taraje Williams-Murray, Oly	Andrew Hermann, Oly
Jessica Armstrong, J.D.	Don Barcome, Jr., Oly	Carrie Sheinberg, Oly
Eli Bremer, Oly	Mitzi Kramer Tighe, Oly	Sue Heon-Preston, Oly
Kathy Johnson Clarke, Oly	Marci Frederick, Oly	Allison Wagner, Oly
Lucila Hemmingsen, J.D.	Scott Donie, Oly	Linda Jezek Wittwer, Oly
Micki King, Oly	Cristina Teuscher Fabbri, Oly	Inga Thompson, Oly
Jon Little, J.D.	Julie Whitman DeLucia	Tiffany Cohen, Oly
Donna Lopiano, Ph.D.	Ian Whatley, Oly	Joan Hansen, Oly
Eva Rodansky	Keith Sanderson, Oly	Tracy Evans-Land, Oly
Pat Rodowsky	Seth Kelsey, Oly	Cathy (Catherine) Hearn, Oly
Jennifer Sey	Bonny Warner Simi, Oly	Betsy Mitchell, Oly
Jennifer Spiegel, J.D.	Sebastian DeFrancesco, Oly	Doug Lewis, Oly
Robert Andrews, MA, LMFT	Joe Jacobi, Oly	Carrie Steinseifer Bates, Oly
Steven Sexton, Ph.D.	Sean O'Neill, Oly	Jessica Howard
	Eric Barnes, Oly	Bill Campbell
Mary Harvey, Oly	Barb Weinstein McGrath, Oly	Dawn Riley
Greg Louganis, Oly	Susie Kincade	Steve Gregg, Oly
Scott Johnson, Oly	Debby McCormick, Oly	Michele Kurtzman Greenfield, Oly
Julianne McNamara, Oly	Nick Peterson, Oly	Jack Elder, Oly
Ariana Kukors Smith, Oly	Monica Rowland	
Brian Goodell, Oly	Jennifer Hooker Brinegar, Oly	
Martina Navratilova, Oly	Allen James, Oly	
Nancy Lieberman, Oly	Becca Gillespy Peter	
Horace Holden, Oly	Frank Thomas, Olympic Coach	
Bill Stapleton, Oly	Rene Henry	
Diana Nyad	Brenda Borgh Bartlett, Oly	
Dave Berkoff, Oly	Janis Hape Dowd, Oly	
Caroline Lind, Oly	Deb Armstrong, Oly	
Cynthia Potter, Oly	Anthony Zahn, Oly	