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Editorial: This took too long. MSU deserved better than John Engler

By The State News Editorial Board

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MSU Interim President John Engler listens during public comment at the Board of Trustees meeting on Oct. 26, 2018.

Anntaninna Biondo | The State News

John Engler should never have been the interim president of Michigan State.

Less than an hour after his appointment, student protesters expressed outrage with the board's decision. The outrage never went away.

He should have been fired last March when he testified before a Senate subcommittee that Nassar survivors were "driven by attorneys."

He should have been fired last April when Nassar survivor Kaylee Lorincz accused him during public comment at a Board of Trustees meeting of offering her \$250,000 in a private meeting — an accusation that Engler didn't deny outright, calling it a "philosophical discussion."

He should have been fired last June when Trustee Brian Mosallam made a motion to terminate him, only to have six trustees vote to keep him.

He should have been fired last December when he discontinued the Healing Assistance Fund for Nassar survivors in direct opposition to the advice of an expert group he created.

He should have been fired in January as soon as three new trustees — all in favor of Engler's termination — joined the board. Instead, at its Jan. 9 meeting, no action was taken about Engler's presidency.

What took so long to get Engler out of office?

The MSU Board of Trustees has long stood behind him — from his unanimous appointment to their repeated affirmations of how well he was doing. Current Trustees Joel Ferguson, Dan Kelly and Melanie Foster all voted to keep Engler in June.

Two days after the Jan. 9 board meeting, Engler gave an interview to The Detroit News in which he said some Nassar survivors were enjoying the spotlight. While what Engler said is blatantly untrue and incredibly harmful, it's not unprecedented.

It shouldn't have changed the opinion of anyone who was already listening.

He had already accused Rachael Denhollander of taking kickbacks from her lawyer, and offered Kaylee Lorincz a check.

Acting like Engler's most recent comments are the last straw ignores every vile thing he's already said and done. It's disrespectful to those belittled and traumatized by his prior actions.

Meeting after meeting, members of the public stood before the board holding signs and shouting for him to be fired.

"I am continually shocked by your lack of action," survivor Kaylee Lorincz said to the board in April.

"You sponsored my assault," survivor Morgan McCaul said to the board at that same meeting.

"Shame on you," Leslie Miller, mother of Nassar survivor Emma Ann Miller, said to the board in June after they declined to terminate Engler.

The MSU Board of Trustees have been asked to either step down or step up, and they've done neither. They had ample opportunity and overwhelming reason to remove him, and yet until Jan. 16, 2019, John Engler remained interim president.

It's a shame. The Board of Trustees sat through public comments at their meetings for a year, in which person after person told them Engler needed to go. They heard all of it.

They must not have been listening.

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