

# THE MINING Journal

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## Engler shown door at MSU following series of insensitive missteps

What was John Engler thinking? The former Michigan governor and interim president of Michigan State University was forced to resign from his post at MSU last week amid criticism of comments he made to members of the media about survivors of the Larry Nassar sexual assault scandal.

Engler was appointed to the position about a year ago after then-President Lou Anna Simon resigned during the Nassar case, which involved hundreds of women and girls being sexually assaulted by the former doctor at MSU and USA Gymnastics.

An experienced politician with the responsibilities and duties he's had, you'd expect Engler to exercise more political tact than he did when he told employees of The Detroit News that Nassar's victims were enjoying

the publicity they were getting — as if anyone wants to be sexually assaulted, then have that personally traumatic experience blasted over the airwaves from coast to coast for millions of people to see, and then essentially be told: *“You’ve been given the money you wanted, so shut up and move on with your life.”*

We’d expect Engler to be a bit more compassionate than that. You think he would have used extreme caution and care when dealing with such sensitive topics, particularly ones which have garnered the national attention like this Nassar situation has.

We’ll give him some credit though: He did oversee the \$425 million settlement for 332 victims. Another \$75 million has been set aside to be paid to future claimants, of whom 172 are under consideration, The News reported. But Engler caused more grief and pain for these Nassar victims than they were already experiencing, and that’s what people will remember him for.

They won’t recall his keeping an eye on the university’s budget, or for trying to improve MSU’s mental health support services, implementing new internal ethics oversight programs, helping settle the tempers of lawmakers in Lansing who wanted to slash the university’s budget and other policies and restructuring measures that have been put in place since the Nassar tragedy came to light. Those efforts are detailed in Engler’s 11-page resignation letter, which can be found online through a quick internet search.

Instead, what will stick in the minds of people across the nation is what Engler said to The Detroit News editorial board: Some of the Nassar victims are *“enjoying”* the spotlight.

That remark led to new criticism of the former governor on social media and a letter being sent to the MSU board by top administrators at the

university demanding he be removed from office.

Engler's comments ultimately amount to what we would describe as unforgivable gaffes, crude remarks from an insensitive, tone-deaf politician.

Understandably, this was a miserable situation for him to inherit, taking the reins in the middle of MSU's worst turmoil yet. But the political moxie we'd seen from him in his long career was blatantly absent, and time and time again while at the university's helm, he lacked the aptitude we'd expect from a polished politician.

The Detroit Free Press reported a long list of actions Engler made which drew him criticism, like: canceling a \$10 million fund created to pay for counseling for Nassar survivors; accusing the first victim to go public, Rachael Denhollander, of getting kickbacks from attorneys for filing a lawsuit against MSU; allegedly offering a \$250,000 payout to a Nassar survivor if she dropped her suit against the university; canceling an issue of the school's alumni magazine that focused on the Nassar case and the university's handling of it, and replacing it with a long Q-and-A article with Engler that focused on what he called the positive changes being made at MSU; and hiring friends and political allies, among other things.

Engler's forced resignation, we hope, will give some peace of mind, if that's even possible, to Nassar's victims. But what MSU as a university does from here matters, too.

Administrators and board trustees at the university still have to work at building trust with prospective and current students and their families. They need to watch and continue to groom the school's culture into one that's welcoming, constructive and more than all, safe.

And they need to practice empathy and sensitivity, something that Engler apparently lacked.

