

A Pertinent History of the USVI Chess Federation

The US Virgin Islands chess Federation has existed since the early seventies and has participated in the World Chess Olympiad since 1974. It was a democratic and ethical organization, supporting chess players who studied chess, played chess, and worked together cooperatively and harmoniously.

In the fall of 1993, Margaret Murphy who was new on island and a newly hired teacher at Manor School, attended her first St. Croix Chess Club meeting at HOVENSA rec center. John Warlick was president of the USVI Chess Federation at the time. Most of the discussion centered around the upcoming 1994 Olympiad in Moscow, Russia.

Fast forward, Margaret was selected for the 1994 women's team and went on to play in the 1996, 1998, and 2000 Olympiads. That was the extent of her team play, but she fell in love with the thrill of Olympic participation. Although her full focus shifted to chess federation administration after her final team placement in 2000, she managed to secure the position of FIDE Delegate for the VI and never missed another Olympiad!

There was always tension between John Warlick and Margaret Murphy. This tension escalated and eventually peaked at the 1999 annual meeting when Margaret Murphy walked into the meeting with 63 proxies of SCEC students and elected herself as president. At that same meeting she wielded her power to remove John Warlick as delegate and replace him.

Between June 2000 and February 2004, John Warlick was involved in litigation with Margaret Murphy over multiple issues, including being unjustifiably removed from the Olympic team and stripped from his position of FIDE delegate. The court case(s) were not resolved in John's favor. Margaret, being bolstered by the success of these legal battles, took the liberty of making monumental changes to the federation constitution and bylaws without the knowledge or two-thirds majority vote of the membership as was required by the USVICF Articles of Incorporation.

In early February 2002, Gail Widmer naively submitted a proposed amendment to eliminate proxy voting. The secretary-treasurer did not distribute the proposed amendment to the membership two weeks prior to the meeting, as the USVICF statutes dictated. At the AGM, the proposed amendment was not mentioned, shared, discussed, or voted on. Little did anyone know at that time that Margaret had already clandestinely drawn up new statutes with no checks and balances, no voting rights for members, no path to the presidency, no "authentic" term limits since now officers could perpetually vote themselves back into office, no avenue to file a complaint or to remove officers. This simple, secret, illegal change of statutes was all it took to completely destroy the USVI Chess Federation as a democratic and fair organization.

At the 2002 annual meeting, John Warlick walked in with a handful of proxies, hoping to turn the tables once again and oust Margaret Murphy. However, a supporter of Margaret Murphy walked in with over 130 proxies of SCEC students and succeeded in keeping

the ball in Margaret Murphy's court. At this point the general membership realized that the federation had deteriorated to an unprecedented low level, as they sat silently witnessing federation officers fighting mercilessly for power. It became very clear that without an amendment to the statutes eliminating proxy voting, ordinary chess playing members would remain at the mercy of self-serving individuals fighting for control amongst themselves.

Most of the St. Croix players missed the 2003 annual meeting and the 1st qualifying tournament that took place in St. Thomas because they received no email or written notification from the secretary-treasurer of either the meeting or the tournament, despite requesting information several times. Consequently, absent St. Croix players lost valuable qualifying points. The 2003 Annual Meeting was only attended by board members plus one or two non-board members. Yet despite the lack of a quorum, elections of officers took place and, ostensibly, amendments to the statutes were approved.

Following the 2003 annual meeting, a revised USVCF Constitution and Bylaws were distributed. The monumentally changed statutes removed members' voting rights, removed the approval of a 2/3 majority vote of the membership for amendments, and removed the "removal clause" that gave members a path to legitimately remove officers for malfeasance. When dazed members questioned how this could happen with no discussion or vote of the membership, Margaret Murphy claimed that Judge Ross authorized her to make the changes.

In March 2003 Gail Widmer wrote to Judge Ross asking if he indeed authorized these bylaw changes. In July 2003, Judge Ross replied that he did not.

In December 2003 Gail Widmer, Nenad Babic, and Ila Mody filed a complaint with the board regarding several unethical practices perpetrated by the Board.

The Board responded in their predictably evasive manner.

By 2006, Margaret Murphy had managed to alienate, offend, or exclude almost all legitimate Virgin Islands chess players. Over the intervening years between 2006 and 2023, she has recruited several non-Virgin Islanders for the men's team, eliminated the women's team, ignored the extensive scholastic chess program in St. Thomas/St. John, reduced the membership to one STX club with questionable membership, and cushioned herself with a board of friends and family. Moreover, Margaret Murphy, President of the USVCF, Anthony Mongiello, Vice-President of the USVCF, and Michael Smith, Secretary of the USVCF, have not been permanent residents of the Virgin Islands for over ten years. Margaret and Anthony are registered voters and file federal taxes in the state of New Hampshire. Michael resides, works, and I presume votes and files federal taxes in, I believe, Ohio.

In August 2021, someone on the FIDE Council reached out to a Scottish chess player who in turn reached out to John Dempsey, former Executive Director of Chess Scotland

and an accomplished chess player residing in St. Croix since 2010, asking if he would be willing to file an official complaint against Margaret Murphy and the USVICF. Ostensibly, several chess federations around the world had raised red flags and were suspected of questionable practices. The USVI was one. The BVI was another. Margaret Murphy assumed then, and still does, that the complaint against and subsequent investigation of the USVICF was initiated by Nigel Short but it was not. FIDE requested that we file a complaint so they would have authorization to come and investigate. Nigel Short, as FIDE vice-president, was selected to travel throughout the Caribbean on behalf of FIDE to view, inspect, and offer support to various small Caribbean chess federations. We were just one of several on FIDE's list.

FIDE responded to our complaint and emails sent to Margaret Murphy were shared with us. She was brought before the FIDE council and resolutions were made. The situation seemed hopeful.

Unfortunately, the complexities of Russia's war with the Ukraine trickled all the way down to the Virgin Islands. FIDE's president Dvorkovich came out publicly against Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. Russia retaliated by stripping Dvorkovich of power and suddenly Dana Reizniece-Ozola, FIDE managing director, was in charge and speaking on behalf of FIDE. The amended USVICF Constitution & Bylaws were "allegedly" accepted in their entirety. It has been subsequently confirmed that the USVICF Constitution & Bylaws were never officially recognized by FIDE.

In 2022, these complex, illegal, and deceptively prejudicial statutes were filed with Corporations & Trademarks. The USVICF governing body, **despite everything**, is still the same five family/friends. The USVICF has only one accepted club, the St. Croix Chess Club. The President of that one club is Margaret Murphy. The Vice-President (Counselor) of that single accepted club is Anthony Mongiello. Since only presidents and counselors of accepted chess clubs have voting rights in the election of officers and since Margaret Murphy and Anthony Mongiello are the voting officers of the one recognized club, Margaret and Anthony are the only two federation members eligible to vote in new officers. The annual meeting that took place on March 25, 2023, was supposed to be an extraordinary election of new officers. According to FIDE's resolution, all VI chess players were supposed to be invited to that meeting to participate in the election of new officers. Since the date, time, and platform for that meeting were not openly shared, only six people attended that meeting, only two of which had voting rights in the election of new officers, namely Margaret Murphy and Anthony Mongiello. So, the two voting members voted the five officers (to include themselves) back into office for four more years. Many, many letters have been sent out to FIDE, the VIOC, the IOC and to the USVICF Board of Administration drawing attention to the built-in inequities and illegal aspects of the USVICF statutes. To date, the USVICF looms large with little to no oversight. They only selectively answer calls and emails are ignored. As a result of these "legally binding" yet fatally flawed statutes, the USVICF selection process for the Olympic teams remains badly skewed.

On August 3, 2022, the VIOC wrote to Margaret Murphy informing her that an investigative committee had been formed to review complaints. They made the following recommendations:

- Number 1 The V.I. Chess Federation shall rewrite the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws to incorporate all recommendations of the International Chess Federation and the VIOC (recommendations attached). With stamped copies from the Office of the Lt. Governor showing submission and approval.
- Number 2 Once all legal documents are approved the V.I. Chess Federation shall conduct an election under the authority of the new Articles and Bylaws. Current parties that are engaged in the ongoing dispute shall be prevented from holding position in the new board. The limitation to participate shall be for a period of one (1) year. This election shall be overseen by the VIOC.
- Number 3 The V.I. Chess Federation shall execute the recommended Conditions, over a ninety-day (90) period, to include ALL interested parties throughout the territory.

On August 10, 2022, the VIOC wrote to Margaret Murphy regarding serious allegations and requested her response.

Margaret Murphy engaged a sports law firm in Maine to represent her, which intimidated the VIOC and caused them to withdraw their investigation.

In July 2023, VI chess players were advised to join the USVICF with the goal of initiating change from within the federation. Consequently, 22 people applied to join the federation. Applications at first were met with scrutiny and suspicion contrary to their filed constitutional objective *“to bring into one organization all people in the Virgin Islands desiring to promote chess.”* After Anne Kershaw pointed out to them that this was in violation of their own bylaws, they distributed membership applications. Membership dues submitted in July were finally deposited in November. The new members are all members of the St. Croix Chess Club. The USVICF Board of Administration recommended that we form new clubs which we did. Over 40 St. Croix chess players formed four clubs: The Nubian Warriors, Quixotic Queens, Tullies Tacticians, and The Wandering Dragons. To date, none have been accepted. Despite repeated inquiries regarding the denial of acceptance, no explanations have been provided.

The new members of the St. Croix Chess Club repeatedly reached out to the USVICF administration through volunteer mediators (Aminah Saleem, Lon Newman, Jeremy Thibodeaux, Anne Kershaw, and Beven Smith), all attempts at mediation fell flat.

As per the rights of members of non-profits, the majority of USVICF members expressed “no confidence” in the current administration and asked the USVICF to call an extraordinary meeting and special election of new interim officers. When the USVICF failed to respond, members assumed their rightful authority to conduct an extraordinary

election of an interim board and did so. Forty-two (42) VI chess players voted to replace the current USVICF administrators with interim officers.

A Memorandum of Understandings along with a Notice of Gross Misconduct were presented to the outgoing USVICF board members but were ignored. Kai Nielsen, Interim President, and Khalid Saleem, Interim STX Vice-President, met with Margaret Murphy in hope of negotiating a civil path forward. Although Kai Nielsen and Khalid Saleem continued to believe that compromise was possible, on Thursday, February 1, 2024, Margaret Murphy confronted Gail Widmer at Office Max and made it clear that she did not recognize any of the actions taken by the membership, that she considered them illegal and intended to pursue the situation in a court of law.

On February 5, 2024, an attorney engaged by the USVICF Interim Board, on the request of a majority of interim board members, emailed Margaret Murphy and other board members requesting that all books of record be available for viewing during normal business hours on February 9, 2024.

On February 8th, the attorney for the Interim Board was informed by the USVICF attorney that the USVICF office would be closed on Friday, February 9th. No alternative date was provided.

Subsequently, the following new permanent USVICF officers were voted into place by the membership:

President: Sinclair Wilkinson
STT Vice President: Brandon Rhymer
STX Vice President: Okemo Hodge
Secretary: Anne Kershaw
Treasurer: William Van Rensselaer

On February 15, VIOC President, Angel Morales, met in person and via Zoom with a majority of USVICF members and committed to presenting the request for recognition to his legal counsel.

On February 28, 2024, Mr. Morales emailed the new leadership stating simply that he did not recognize them.

In early March 2024, both FIDE and Randy Bauer, USCF president, were informed about the change of USVICF leadership. On March 6, 2024, this was Randy Bauer's reply: *"...the United States of America Chess Federation has reviewed the submitted documents and is quite satisfied that there has been a change in leadership in the USVI Federation. We look forward to working with them - quite frankly, the previous Federation leadership did not seem to share our interest in growing chess. I am extending an invitation to the new Board of Directors to meet with our Executive Board on how we can work together to grow chess in our respective federations."*

Aleksandr Martynov, FIDE legal advisor, stated that as soon as VIOC president Morales recognized the new leadership, they would follow suit.

On June 11 a Letter of Appeal was sent to the VIOC asking them to reverse Morales's decision.

After a phone call from Sinclair Wilkinson to Angel Morales on or around June 28, asking for an update on our appeal letter, Mr. Morales agreed to meet with Gail Widmer and Okemo Hodge on July 5 in STX. In the conversation with Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. Morales said he and John Abramson were behind us 100% and that it was time for Margaret Murphy to step down. Things looked promising.

On July 5, Okemo Hodge and Gail Widmer met with Mr. Morales at Flavors of the Caribbean. He told us that if we sent him a letter stating precisely what he dictated, he would pass the letter onto Margaret Murphy and insist that she hold another election. He went on to say, if she refused, the VIOC would conduct the election. After following his directive to the "T", Mr. Morales did nothing.

Numerous phone calls and emails between Sinclair Wilkinson and Mr. Morales followed without result.

On July 16, Senator Carla Joseph called a Zoom meeting. The following people attended: Senator Joseph, Angel Morales, Margaret Murphy, Michael Smith, Sinclair Wilkinson, Anne Kershaw. The meeting was not recorded so attendees have different memories of how the meeting concluded. Sinclair Wilkinson and Anne Kershaw remember it concluding with Senator Joseph confirming the authenticity of our special election. Conversely, Morales believed he was authorized to conduct another special election upon his return from the summer Olympics in mid-August. It was initially thought that Mr. Morales would need time to engage in a process of verifying that the members who voted were members in good standing at the time of the voting. Ms. Murphy then represented that the issue was not whether dues were paid, rather the issue was that the vote was not conducted in accordance with the USVICF constitution in effect at the time. It was at this point that Senator Joseph confirmed that it did not matter what the constitution said, that it was the majority vote that counted. Margaret Murphy confirmed that she had no issue with unpaid dues. Senator Joseph informed Ms. Murphy and Mr. Morales that according to VI law, if a majority of corporate members votes for new leadership, they do not need to follow corporation by-laws, especially when corporation by-laws do not include a provision for special membership meetings. Mr. Morales then agreed to accept the new leadership upon his return from Paris on August 13, 2024.

On July 25, 2024, Attorney Ethan Peterson, ostensibly representing the USVICF on behalf of Margaret Murphy, filed for a Declaratory Judgement against Gail Widmer and Anne Kershaw.

On August 9, 2024, Gail Widmer filed for a Motion to Dismiss.

On August 21, after being reminded of his commitment to confirm his recognition of the new leadership on August 13, Mr. Morales emailed Senator Joseph claiming to have been told by Ms. Murphy that dues were still outstanding and therefore considered the situation to be at another standstill. Again Mr. Morales was informed via email that there were no outstanding 2023 membership dues, as had been proven repeatedly. Senator Joseph told Mr. Morales to stop wasting everyone's time and accept the new leadership. Wheel bend. Story end.

As of August 31, 2024, Mr. Morales had not replied to Senator Joseph and had taken no action.

The lawsuit remains ongoing.

In summary, prior to 2024, the USVCF, under the lengthy questionable leadership of Margaret Murphy, had a very small following in STX, conducted no activities or tournaments in STT/STJ, refused four STX club applications (denying membership to over 40 adult players plus students), conducted small unadvertised events in STX for those few who were fortunate to be in her favor, and stopped (or in the case of the St. Thomians, "ignored") all chess activities not initiated by her. Now in 2024, she is desperately trying to do things to make herself look legitimate. Suddenly, after denying membership to four legitimate STX chess clubs, she now claims to have two new clubs. Information about these clubs is, of course, obscure. Margaret Murphy is, in my opinion, a master manipulator who will stop at nothing to hold onto her power. It should be obvious that she does not genuinely care about the growth of chess in the Virgin Islands. Bottom line: Margaret Murphy is not a Virgin Islands resident. She owns property, pays taxes, owns a business, and is a registered voter in the state of New Hampshire. Why Virgin Islanders in leadership positions **tolerate** this non-resident woman's deception and strangulating control is beyond my comprehension. Thank God for Senator Joseph who had the courage to take a stand for what is both legal and morally right!

To the best of my memory, all of the information included here is correct and accurate.

Respectfully compiled and submitted by



Gail Widmer

Member of the USVCF from 1978 to 2006 and later from July 2023 to the present, Board 1 on the USVI Olympic women's team in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006.

