

Reasons NOT to Change the Name "U.S. Hang Gliding Association"

The question of whether to change the name of the **U.S. Hang Gliding Association** is not new. It has surfaced before and the membership has given an answer. Still, it continues to be asked. Is the plan to wear us down? This answer has been delivered by the membership several times before. Asking it again and again amounts to low-grade political badgering.

This time things are different in that the Board, who represents us, is thankfully taking charge of the communication regarding the issue. This letter and the "pro" statement published side-by-side are proof that Mark Forbes and the other Executive Board members are bent on avoiding lopsided polls. I salute that conviction.

To address specific points why a name change is ill-advised:

1. There is no need.

The name **U.S. Hang Gliding Association** is completely accurate and descriptive. It suits us all very well. Every one of us flies a hang glider; everyone is served by this name. (Of course I'm assuming we're still a hang gliding organization, dedicated to the sport of hang gliding. Now, if we're not—if the attempts to add powered piloting have somehow changed our resolve, or if somewhere we gave our permission to rewrite our mission away from focused support of personal soaring flight—then a much larger disconnect exists between membership wishes and leadership execution, which no name switch discussion can resolve.)

The name **U.S. Hang Gliding Association** states the important points already, and implies by inference the third. "Hang" denotes a posture during flight or launch, and also denotes some weight shift control. "Glider" denotes flight without power. The inferred requirement is foot-launchability. ALL craft meeting these requirements are Hang Gliders, and there is no confusion either in governmental bodies across the English-speaking globe or in pilot or even public perception regarding that. Ie, a Hang Glider is what it is not by its lines or colors, but by virtue of what you can do with it.

If a name must be changed—and none does—we'd almost do better to rename the Paraglider, whose name seems to incorrectly differentiate that craft from Hang Gliders. Jerome and some others claim that "we must align ourselves with the common notion that PG and HG are 2 different things," but I don't recall this being the battle cry when the USHGA welcomed paraglider pilots into the Association a few years ago. If we were truly different things, then we'd belong in different Associations, because the simple fact is that members do NOT want an organization that is even minimally defocused from their interests, wants, and needs.

So assuming the adoption of Paragliding into the USHGA was the right move (and it was), it follows that there's no appreciable difference between these two types of hang gliders. In fact there's no difference other than the design specifics. A PG is a soft-wing or frameless wing Hang Glider. It is not a different beast, merely a different manifestation. Not even the public differentiates it; we continually have to describe the two types in detail to get them to notice much difference at all. (Don't

get me wrong, I'm not advocating changing the name of Paragliders! It too would be stupid, for other reasons. I'm using this to illustrate that there is nothing wrong with our current Association name, and that we shouldn't fix Fido by castrating Rover.)

Jerome says, "Having an association name biased as HG-only... conveys: HG rules here." Well, I have to say hang gliding does rule here. And we're all part of it. Let's not lose the Association's good name because we mistakenly failed to call a RAM-air wing a "hang glider" to begin with. Let's instead just start acknowledging what it is. It's that simple.

If it's unity we want, we already have it. Dividing ourselves or diluting our focus in the name of Unity is seen by many as a thinly disguised attempt to "evolve" us toward an agenda quite different, and one we never approved to begin with. The real goal attempting to be served in all this, say critics, is not to unify HG and PG, but to genericize us toward a much more bureaucratic, larger organization dedicated more to its own growth than to our specific needs and activities. If this has even an element of truth, we should recognize that the BOD is not specifically party to such a goal, and that it's in our best interest to tell them how we feel about it. Collectively we need to put any such scheming to a stop.

There is no pressing need to change our name. It's a prefabricated need.

2. It ignores the bathwater but still discards the baby.

The day the Daughters of the American Revolution upgrade their name to include Sons and to mention other skirmishes is a day they will have lost the historical momentum they currently enjoy. The day the Sioux Nation's Sundance Mountain is renamed George Custer State Park is another sad one. If we were starting our organization today, it would be a fine idea to brainstorm for a good name. But we've driven this train—successfully and with a lot of people pulling and watching—for more than a generation now. We have momentum. We have History. One doesn't throw that away lightly, on the imaginings that it will make us feel better about each other or ourselves.

Of all the problems and issues we have, our name is one piece of collateral of real value to us. We have developed a tremendous amount of **Good Will** over 30 years of competent administration, among governing bodies at all levels, from Federal to County. That Good Will was not entirely earned recently, either. It's the sum of energies donated over decades by thousands.

Realize that a name change is never suggested unless an Identity Change is intended. And that's what would occur, not only in our minds but in those of all entities with which we deal. Then, when we become someone else, what happens to all that Good Will? The fact is that no one knows, and risking it for no pressing reason is a risk we don't need to take.

In the very simplest view, a name change would require governing bodies like the FAA and National Park Service and many others to modify forms and documents, inviting new policy reviews and a world of unwanted side effects. And far more subtle repercussions—untraceable and therefore deniable by those who brought them on—could and would ensue. We'd have to begin to invent ourselves again.

In addition, there is the very real loss of **Name Recognition**. The public knows us by our craft. (Do they know the SSA? Not nearly as well.) Would they still identify us by generic terms like "Sport Flight" or "Free Flight"? It would likely confuse them; right now they can see us on a TV commercial, in a magazine, or above the local mountain, and know who we are and where to look for more information. The main instructional schools in the country claim they introduce people to the USHGA rather than the other way around, but that's not always true of the hundreds of small schools and independent instructors and tandem instructors, who collectively make up a rather large body of Good Will agents. If name switch confusion can hurt their referral rate, it can hurt overall ability to even maintain existing numbers, much less grow.

The only way a name switch would help us grow is that it would open the door for our staff to convert us into a generalized, non-soaring-focused sport flight organization. And, it's been charged, that's one driving ambition behind it. Realize that this agenda does NOT help us grow our hang gliding numbers; it only adds other kinds of people onto our roster, which is not the same thing. Unless we want that to occur, with the attendant loss of representation that would accompany it, we need to oppose the name change.

In the world of business and commerce, such an identity switch is generally considered "marketing suicide." Often suppliers and other partner entities do their best to dissuade it, as it impacts them too, with no advantage. The few cases where it has been done in the Private Sector successfully—Nissan for example—are held up as rare exceptions, and even they incurred enormous costs in recognizability, not to mention money. Ask the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) when they are going to become politically correct. They know the value of Identity, with the weight of History and established accomplishment behind it. Why don't we see the Teamsters become the Truck And CB Radio Operators? Why not an upgrade to Long-and-medium-shoremen, or Longshorepersons? What about the Veterans of Foreign Beers? Sports teams from Boilermakers to Indians to Redlegs to Lakers—who-have-no-lake all know the historical value of a name. The reigning wisdom says that names are like thermals—if you have a good one, keep it. Hopping to a different one won't help you core them any better.

3. There is no value.

Proponents of the change claim that they know pilots who feel alienated by our current name. Yet alienation is entirely in the mind of the beholder. Does a member of the "Cloudbase Country Club" who's never been to cloudbase deserve a different club monicker? I belong to the "Wings Of Rogallo" chapter here in California. To be honest, I've never bought a wing from that venerable gentleman in my life. Should I insist we rename our club the "Wings of Rogallo, Trampenau, Pearson, and Moyes?" Or the "Wings of Designer's Name Here"? Attempting to feel unified by changing our name is like hoping to feel strong by adopting the name Sampson. It does nothing toward the real goal.

And there isn't even a better name anyway! I challenge anyone to come up with a name to which we couldn't find objections. The perfect name simply does not exist. We have a good one, with History and Pride behind it. Let's all be proud we joined THIS association, and make it better while honoring who and what have gone before.

4. There is considerable cost.

For starters, how much did we spend on the USHGA website? You'd be angry if you knew. Of course we'd have to modify it...and stationery, and ads, and T-shirts and mugs. The By-laws would have to be edited, and all competition forms, and everything going to the CIVL and the FAI, the glider certification bodies, etc. That's just at the National level. Do we really want to saddle the hundreds of small, strapped local clubs with the need to change their forms, bylaws, documents with park services, websites, shirt and hat stocks, letters on file with local land-owners...? Even if the front office is prepared to spend our money on a cosmetic attempt at bigness, the last thing every local club wants is to have to assign a task force to re-do everything that's been built up for three decades.

We have far better things on which our dues and energies can be spent, such as the sponsoring of local flying events or—if there truly is more money that we know how to spend, just reduce fees for T-shirts and other items that identify us. Put photos on our bodies, but don't try to change our historically proud name.

5. It is divisive.

Here's the big one. The perpetual resurfacing of this issue reinforces negative opinions about the USHGA Executive hired guns and about the BOD, and alienates more members. It can potentially divide us in two. Do you think we've recovered from the divisions created by other sweeping changes? We have not. The last thing we need at this point in time, when \$50 is a hard thing for people to part with, is to be carelessly alienating still more members. All value arguments aside, courting disaster needlessly would be stupid.

Intelligent, reasonable members say things like, "I thought I was in a hang gliding organization that was focused on hang gliding needs," and "the BOD will do as it wishes," and "I like belonging to an organization dedicated to hang gliding, anyone know of such a group?," and "at this point, a change in name is not the change the USHGA is in need of." Does this sound like a contented membership? No group appears satisfied, regardless of wing type. Everyone seems to feel the focus of yesteryear has been diluted, with the intention on serving some agenda of ambition that's not our own. We need to turn this around, and ram-rodging yet another bitter pill down the Associations' throat is the least enlightened way it could be attempted.

A growing number of articulate, thoughtful members feel the Association's habit is to re-take votes of Front Office pet campaigns again and again until the proper result is achieved. They claim they saw it happen in the magazine combination, and similar hijynx in the recent "power" election; prior to that, some say that sweeping changes were not even brought up for vote. Now these members see this new offer to change our identity as one more step in a long series of metamorphoses that have occurred essentially despite the will of the membership. They fear a push to add powered pilots and other non-hang-gliding groups year by year, until enough support exists to carry these personal agendas forward—private ambitions, which they say have us one day soon becoming the North American Sport Flight Organization or some such. Is there really a cloaked plan for an all-encompassing body including

powered ultralights and parachutes and pretty much every sport aviation mechanism imaginable, an organization capable of financial momentum and real political influence, even if it must also be incapable of representing foot-launched personal soaring craft anymore? Are these angry members misguided in their assessment? Can we discount their apprehensions? Certainly not by pushing still further down the line that seems to prove those very claims.

Some very few in positions of power have murmured that our name is "too limiting" and "no longer in line with our mission." Now a growing list of alarmed members is asking: "What has changed? So far our name clearly hasn't. So...our mission has changed? Who authorized that?" It gives one pause.

Whatever the truth regarding rumors of illegitimate, closely held "visions" in high places, courting this type of grass-roots dissention can be a form of slow suicide. Regardless of the provability of such fears, those who hold them are not insignificant in number and are growing at an alarming rate. It is not wise to feed the fires of revolt, no matter how poorly informed we consider the populace, especially for a change that is so useless as this one. A French king could tell you that.

Summary:

Good reasons to keep our good name:

- It is our accurate **Identity**.
- We have a lot of valuable **History** and **Pride**.
- We have a lot of **Earned Respect** and **Good Will**.
- We have excellent **Name Recognition**.

Good reasons not to change:

- There is no better name anyway.
- There would be **substantial cost** at all levels, including all local clubs.
- It could possibly take us down a road to eventually losing our Association.
- This issue is **divisive** and a time bomb.

Even this poll, and this letter, are having time wasted on them. Yours. Mine. The BODs. Why must we be ever-vigilant like this? Why must we waste time trying NOT to fix what ain't broke? Let's deliver a message; let's give the BOD the ammunition they need to set aside nonsense and get on with things that will really help this organization and its CURRENT MEMBERS.

Respectfully,

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