

Salt Lake City commits to seeking 2026 Winter Olympics

By Howard Berkes, NPR

Ten years after jumpstarting Mitt Romney's political career with a widely-praised Winter Olympics, officials in Utah say they're ready to do it all over again.

But there's no word on whether the unemployed Romney is interested in reprising his role as Salt Lake City Olympics chief. He would be 78, after all, when the 2026 games roll around. That's the earliest opportunity for a Winter Olympics in the United States.

"Salt Lake City and the great state of Utah are ready, willing and able to host a future Olympic Games" if the U.S. Olympic Committee pursues another winter Olympic bid, according to Gary Herbert, Utah's Republican governor, in an announcement Monday at the Olympic Cauldron Park on the University of Utah campus.

Herbert and Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker made the decision after reviewing a report from an exploratory commission.

The commission referred to a survey finding 74 percent support for another Utah Olympics among those polled. The report also said that 40 percent of the nation's winter Olympic athletes train at the 2002 Olympic facilities in Utah, which include an indoor speed skating oval, ski jumping ramps, a freestyle skiing training ramp and pool and a bobsled, luge and skeleton track.

The bidding process for the 2002 Olympics was tainted by a bribery scandal that involved more than \$1 million in illicit gifts for members of the International Olympic Committee. The

scandal prompted congressional hearings, criminal charges and a painful reform process for the IOC and the USOC.

Lingering embarrassment from the scandal may hinder Salt Lake City's new bid. But a bigger barrier is the USOC and a pending decision on the best time to nominate a U.S. city to be the next Olympic host.

"We obviously are appreciative that the Olympic movement is strong enough to have cities interested in potentially bidding," says Patrick Sandusky, the USOC's spokesman. "However the USOC is focused on determining when it would be the right time to potentially bid for an Olympic Games."

The USOC has decided that the next Olympics to possibly have an American bid is the 2024 summer games. The USOC is considering a bidding strategy and if it decides to nominate a U.S. city for the summer Olympics, it's not likely an American city will also bid for the winter games that follow two years later.

There are also at least three other possible U.S. bidders for the 2026 winter games: Reno-Lake Tahoe; Bozeman, Mont.; and Denver.

An American nominee would go up against other cities around the world and the IOC would make a final decision.

A USOC working group on Olympic bidding is set to report to the USOC board at a meeting scheduled for Dec. 19. But Sandusky says that the group is only providing an update and not a recommendation for a future bid.

New York failed in its bid for the 2012 Olympics and Chicago lost out in the bidding for the 2016 games. Both bids were hampered, in part, by a persistent revenue-sharing dispute between the IOC and the USOC.

That dispute was resolved in May. One of the key negotiators

for the USOC was Fraser Bullock, Romney's second-in-command during the 2002 Olympics, an adviser for Salt Lake City's new Olympic exploratory committee and a respected figure among IOC members.