

Using Title IX to Ensure Equal Opportunity for Women in Math Science

Senator Ron Wyden

M. President, the confirmation of the Secretary of Education by the Senate, important as it is, is not the only important development in the annals of American education this week. I'm sure most of my colleagues have heard about the remarks made by Harvard President Lawrence Summers this week that women may be underrepresented in math and the sciences because of innate differences between men and women.

I spoke with Dr. Summers this morning. He made it clear to me that he is acutely aware that remarks he intended to be thought-provoking crossed the line. He knows that as the president of one of America's most venerable institutions, his views are heard worldwide. I expect he will continue to express his contrition to the Harvard community and to the educational community as a whole.

I have devoted much time myself to this issue. In 2002 when I became Chairman of the Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space, I pursued this issue on a bipartisan basis. Today, I want to bring to the Senate floor the question that **should** be on the table at this point: What's going to be done now, immediately, to create more opportunities to advance girls and women equitably in science and math education?

It's very seldom when problem comes up that there's a tool right at our fingertips to solve it. But in studying this issue, I have become convinced that Title IX of the Education Act can be the key to ensuring gender equity in these fields.

Title IX reads like this: *No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.* It means that any institution receiving Federal funds must make sure that women are treated equitably.

The most common misconception about Title IX is that it applies only to sports. That's just not true. Athletics are certainly where we've seen the most progress under Title IX. Before Title IX, one in 17 girls in school played sports. Now it's one in 2.5, or 40 percent. **Imagine if those same changes could be seen in math, science and engineering from the 20 percent of science undergraduates who are women today, to 40 percent or even 50 percent. From the six percent of engineering professors who are women today, to 40 percent.**

The potential of Title IX is enormous. Enforcing it in these fields could revolutionize the study and application of math and science in this country. Educators of good conscience should not wait for a Federal reprimand to comply with this Federal law that ultimately benefits us all. Title IX should be a guiding principle in hiring, tenure, scholarships, and lab space for all scholars.

I'm not calling for the same application of Title IX that's been necessary in sports. While boys and girls play different sports, men and women can study, teach and work in the same disciplines. Universities don't need an equal number of slots for men and women on the science faculty. But there absolutely must be an **equal shot at all the slots for both.**

Title IX can finally give women studying science a fair shake where they haven't gotten one before. That doesn't sound like a tall order, but it's still not happening. And amazingly, the Federal government and the Department of Education are doing very little about that.

In my efforts to increase the number of women in the fields of math and science, our colleague Senator Barbara Boxer joined me to request a report from the Government Accountability Office to see whether the U.S. government is following the law and enforcing Title IX. The GAO's findings were disappointing at best. GAO looked at the Department of Education, NASA, the Department of Energy, and the National Science Foundation, and found that little or no efforts were being made to assure compliance with Title IX requirements for grantees getting federal dollars.

Of all the agencies reviewed, the Department of Education was the only federal agency that conducted any Title IX compliance reviews (3 in 1994 and 1995), but had not conducted a single review since 1995.

Today, the Federal Government is not doing its part to ensure that Title IX is being enforced for women and girls with the ability and desire to work in math and science.

I have sent letters to outgoing Secretary of Education Rod Paige and to President Bush asking that Title IX be enforced as intended. But today I am formally calling on incoming Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to work to ensure that the girls and women in our federally funded schools do not suffer discrimination in math and the sciences. It is not just an issue of fairness it's an issue of national security as well.

Giving women the opportunities they deserve is crucial not only for them, but for the country as a whole. A report from the Hart-Rudman Commission on National Security to 2025 warned that America's failure to invest in science and to reform math and science education was the second biggest threat to our national security. It warned that only the threat of a weapon of mass destruction in an American city was a greater danger. In fact, the Commission unanimously concluded that the danger from under-investing in math and science and failing to reform math and science education was greater than the danger from any conceivable conventional war.

On this Inauguration Day, I call on the new Education Secretary to take that message to heart. Dr. Summers' remarks have sparked serious debate about an important issue. And as the Senate confirms a new Education Secretary, I think there's no better time to return our attention to it.

The conversation about equity for women in math and science needs to take on new life at the Department of Education. The conversation I had with Larry Summers this morning certainly wasn't over when we hung up the phone. What began as a controversy this week can *best* end with greater opportunity for women and girls wishing to enter math and science fields. That's the end I intend to pursue. M. President, I yield the floor.