Wrestling With Title IX

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At long last, a federal commission is trying to deal with the feminist regulatory outrages committed in the name of Title IX. The recommendations passed on January 30 by the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics are a timid start on the rocky road back from bureaucratic mischief-making, but we still have a long way to go.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a simple, straightforward federal law requiring that schools and colleges receiving federal funds not discriminate "on the basis of sex." The law says nothing about equal numbers of men and women, sex-integration, "proportionality," quotas, affirmative action, remedies for underrepresentation or past discrimination, or even about sports.

Reasonable people would understand this law as requiring institutions to offer equal educational opportunities to women, not as making it the federal government's business if more women than men enroll in women's studies courses, and more men than women play football. But now enter from stage left a feminist named Bernice Sandler who took over the Office of Civil Rights in Jimmy Carter's Department of Education.

She picked the innocuous word "proportionality" out of the dictionary (not out of the law), and turned it into a feminist code word for one of three tests by which college athletic departments would be judged as to their compliance with Title IX. She created a new definition for this word: if 56 percent of a student body is female, then 56 percent of the students playing on athletic teams must be female.

This rule is not only unfair but ridiculous because men like to play sports far more than women do. It's a fact of human nature that female college students do not seek to play on athletic teams in anywhere near the percentage that male students do.

Furthermore, a significant percentage of the female college population is made up of "re-entry" women. Those are older women who return to college after their children are grown or after divorce, and they surely aren't going to college to play basketball or soccer.

In the Clinton Administration, an even more aggressive feminist, Norma Cantu, became head of the Education Department's Civil Rights Office. She made "proportionality" the only test for Title IX compliance.

Using proportionality as her sword, she went on the warpath to investigate and threaten college athletic departments even when no one had filed any complaint. She used the power of the bureaucracy, and sometimes activist judges, to force colleges to enforce the proportionality ratio by a numbers count of male and female students on teams compared to students enrolled in the college.

During the Clinton Administration, Title IX was aggressively used to abolish college men's sports as well as to create women's teams. In line with feminist ideological goals, the teams abolished were those where men excel, i.e., men's wrestling, men's gymnastics, men's golf, and football.

Colleges have eliminated 171 wrestling teams (40 percent of the national total) plus hundreds of other sports in which men excel, many of them trophy-winning teams. The evidence is overwhelming that Title IX has been turned into a tool to punish men.

The effect on men's sports, and specifically on wrestling teams, is not an unintended consequence. The feminists' intention is to eliminate everything that is masculine or macho, and to pretend that women are equal to men in physical prowess and desire.

The feminist implementation of Title IX has nothing to do with equalizing the amount of money spent on women's and men's sports, as the abolition of wresting proves. Wrestling is one of the least expensive of all athletic teams; all wrestlers need to practice is a mat.

Further proof that money is not the issue is shown by the fact that wrestling teams have been eliminated even when completely financed by alumni and supporters. So have other men's teams that were quite willing to raise their own funds.

In 1996 the Clinton Department of Education feminists began requiring colleges to count "walk-ons" in figuring their proportionality quotas. A walk-on is a non-scholarship student who tries out for a sport even though he wasn't recruited and isn't subsidized, hoping he will get to play on the team anyway.

There are many times more male walk-ons than female, either because more men than women are much more eager to try out for sports, or are far more willing to sit on the bench day after day with little chance of ever starting in a game. Colleges have been forced to meet their proportionality goals by refusing to let non-scholarship males try out in soccer, baseball, tennis, gymnastics, track and field, dashing their dreams that they will ever be allowed to compete.

Since all this mischief was created, not by law, but by a stroke of the pen in the Department of Education, we hope the Bush Administration will use the same bureaucratic pen to terminate anti- male implementation of Title IX and return to the rule of the law as it was passed by Congress.