

HASKELL INDIAN NATIONS UNIVERSITY

Employee accused of sexually harassing students

Stacey Saldanha-Olson  
Topeka Capital-Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

A Haskell Indian Nations University employee is accused of sexually harassing students, garnering the attention of a U.S. senator.

The Department of Interior inspector general released a report in May saying a Bureau of Indian Education employee was sexually harassing students on the Haskell women’s basketball team.

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, gave The Capital-Journal an exclusive statement reacting to the report.

“The latest report summary from the Department of Interior Inspector General confirmed yet again the ongoing abuse of students attending Haskell University, underscoring the urgent need for accountability, oversight and reform at the university,” Moran said in a written statement. “Last year, an investigatory report was released which uncovered that Haskell employees did not have current and complete background checks, another example of the Bureau of Indian Edu-

cation’s negligence in conducting sufficient oversight of the university and its staff.

“Students at Haskell deserve a learning environment free from harassment, abuse or mistreatment, and I committed to working to reform the governance of the university.”

A BIE spokesperson said the department is taking necessary steps to address the issue.

“The Bureau of Indian Education and Haskell Indian Nations University are committed to the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and faculty,” the spokesperson said in a statement. “BIE and Haskell have taken significant steps to strengthen campus safety and student support services, including updating policies related to student safety and updating employee training requirements.

“The health, safety, and dignity of students and staff remain a top priority for BIE and Haskell. As a matter of policy, we do not comment on individual personnel matters.”

The report made by DOI states the Office of the In-

spector General conducted an investigation and found an athletic trainer was sexually harassing students.

“We found that the employee made crude jokes and comments of a sexual nature to students and engaged in unwelcome physical contact with at least one student; we also found that the employee’s behavior deterred some student-athletes from going to the athletic training room to receive treatment,” the report read.

The report says supervising staff knew of the problem and didn’t address it appropriately.

“Additionally, we found that the employee’s supervisor and other staff were aware of the harassing conduct but failed to report the behavior as required under PB 18-01 and the Haskell SOP Handbook,” the report read.

Despite the report’s official release date being listed as May 5, a notification of the report didn’t go out until June 9 and only a summary of the report is publicly available.

The employee’s name isn’t included, nor is their employment status. The supervisor’s name also wasn’t provided.

Some Kansas residents opposing mega cattle feedlot

Calen Moore  
KANSAS NEWS SERVICE

PAWNEE COUNTY — The western side of Kansas is a great place to produce beef.

It has wide open spaces that seem to go on forever and low humidity. The region has embraced its beef culture and is now home to 75% of the state’s feedlots. These facilities are where cattle are sent to be fed a high-energy diet to gain weight before being sent to a beef packing plant.

Outside of small towns these feedlots look like miles of fences with cattle standing end to end. But some people have started to be wary of these expansive developments.

“It’s good to live in beef country, as long as it ain’t too close. They’re able to stir up enough dust and stink,” Merrill Cauble said.

Cauble is a farmer who lives near the town of Larned in Pawnee County. He has been skeptical of the increase of feedlots near where he lives.



Students from Barton Community College, Dodge City Community College and Kansas State University take samples from a family’s well to check the nitrate levels. PROVIDED BY JOE VINDUSKA/BARTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pushing back against the norm

The company Innovative Livestock Solutions has feedlots across central Kansas and Nebraska. There are three in Pawnee County with a combined capacity of 72,000 cattle.

They are looking to expand and proposed a new facility that can hold 88,000 cattle. That’s a lot of livestock for a county with only about 6,000 people. It would be one of the biggest feedlots in Kansas.

All those animals are estimated to produce over 5 million pounds of manure every day. Beef cattle eat high protein diets, which can produce nitrogen heavy manure. That poses a risk if it gets into waterways or seeps into the aquifer underground where people get their drinking water.

“It’s not going to do the community any good whatsoever, and that’s why we decided to push back,” Cauble said.

After the Kansas Department of Health and Environment reviewed the feedlot’s plans, the agency held a public hearing in Larned to see what the town had to say about it.

According to the EPA, Kansas ranks second in the nation in estimated area with higher levels of nitrates in drinking water than permissible.

The EPA estimates that 5% of Kansans have private, unregulated water wells.

Kansas State University student Chase Glasscock said most of those Kansans are farmers who keep the economy going, and neglecting their needs could hurt the state.

“If we’re not taking care of them, then we’re not taking care of ourselves,” Glasscock said when presenting his data to the public in November.

to start later this year, with the facility operating by 2027

Where to go from here

Response from the health department and company

KDHE said in an email that the reason the ILS feedlot was approved was because it met all the statutory and regulatory requirements. But the agency did acknowledge the elevated risk the region has due to its soil composition.

To try and address the community’s concerns, KDHE provided stricter guidelines than the minimum to control pollution. That includes seepage requirements for the manure lagoon and protections for groundwater much greater than required by state law.

“We are committed to our role in protecting the environment but also acknowledge that owners of feeding facilities have rights that have been set in law. We are only able to enforce requirements that we have jurisdiction over,” KDHE spokesperson Mitchell Osterlund said.

Something in the water

Pawnee County and other central Kansas counties already have an established history of high nitrate levels in their groundwater.

The soil in this region is very sandy, so things can easily leak through. The community also sits above the Ogallala aquifer. Towns like Larned rely almost exclusively on the aquifer for drinking water.

Late last year, student researchers from three Kansas colleges found that nitrate levels in private wells in south-central Kansas are as much as five times higher than Environmental Protection Agency limits for healthy drinking water, which is 10 milligrams per liter.

High nitrate levels in water can cause “blue baby syndrome” where children under six months have their blood deprived of oxygen. There are also some studies that link high nitrate levels with increased risk of some colon and kidney cancers.

The researchers say the pollution is likely due to fertilizer leaking into the groundwater. But some Larned residents believe that fresh feedlot manure is contributing to that as well, but it’s not clear if that has been proven.

ILS also expressed an interest to go above and beyond and adhere to more stringent standards tailored to this unique situation.

ILS sent Jon Skelton, their chief financial officer, to the meeting to calm the waters.

Skelton told the attendees that a significant number of ILS shareholders live locally within or near the county.

ILS didn’t respond to a request for comment.

There have been proponents of the feedlot who have been surprised by the negative backlash. A few spoke at the public hearing and have been trying to make the case that this feedlot will create economic opportunities.

It’s estimated that the feedlot will create 70 jobs for the town, but also could provide a strong market for nearby farmers and agribusinesses.

Pawnee County has been steadily losing its population for decades. Some here are eager for new business and development.

In a press release, ILS estimated it will contribute approximately \$50 million in added valuation to Pawnee County’s tax base.

With the permit approved, construction is planned

Felix Revello is a chapter delegate for the Kansas Sierra Club near Larned. He has been leading the charge in opposition to the feedlot.

“We want the permit to operate the proposed feedlot withheld until after any water and air pollution from existing feedlots is researched and remediated,” Revello said.

Revello and Cauble spent their time at a local festival handing out a petition to appeal KDHE’s approval of the feedlot’s permit. With over 50 signatures and a lot of firsthand stories about health and environmental concerns with a feedlot of this magnitude, Revello delivered the information to Gov. Laura Kelly’s office.

“Urban areas would not tolerate this level of health risk and pollution,” Revello said. “Why do we constantly ask our rural residents to?”

Calen Moore covers western Kansas for High Plains Public Radio and the Kansas News Service.

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Rend Collective - 7/11

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ZZ Top - 8/6

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