

OPINION

Title IX's effectiveness in addressing campus sexual assault is at risk

By: Tammi Walker

Most Americans assume that schools are legally required to protect students from sexual harassment and assault under Title IX — the federal law enacted in 1972 that bans sexual discrimination in education.

I am a law professor and researcher who has spent more than a decade examining the disconnect between what Title IX promises on paper and what students expect it to deliver in practice. What's happening now isn't just another policy shift — it's a dismantling of protections many assume still exist.

Title IX's 37 words

The main text of Title IX is just 37 words and reads: "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 education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

This legal text doesn't define sex or discrimination, or explain what kinds of behavior the act covers. For decades, the Department of Education filled in those gaps by writing detailed rules, providing guidance to schools and investigating when schools failed to comply.

In 2020, the Trump administration adopted much narrower rules. Colleges and universities have to act only when top officials — such as deans or Title IX coordinators — receive a report, and even then, their responses only have to avoid being "clearly unreasonable."

In 2024, the Biden administration tried to widen those protections by requiring schools to step in whenever employees other than doctors and therapists learned of possible harassment, and to do so promptly and effectively. But in January 2025, a federal court blocked those rules before they could take effect.

Today those less protective 2020 rules remain in place, and the agency responsible for enforcing them is being dismantled.

In March 2025, President Donald Trump ordered the Department of Education to close. Legally, an executive order cannot abolish the department outright. That would require an act of Congress.

But the order has still reshaped the agency in practice by cutting staff and shuttering offices. The Office for Civil Rights, which handles Title IX and other discrimination complaints in schools, was especially hard hit. About 260 employees were laid off, and seven of its 12 regional offices were closed, even though more than 6,000 investigations were unresolved as of January.

A federal judge has since ordered those employees to be reinstated, with staff scheduled to return in phases through November 2025. It is not clear how these and other changes are going to affect how the office functions.

A system under strain

Beyond the headlines about layoffs, the deeper question is what happens when students turn to Title IX for protection.

The Heritage Foundation's long-term vision provides a clue: Project 2025 proposes to move the Office of Civil Rights into the Department of Justice and limit its role to litigation of intentional discrimination cases.

While Trump distanced himself from Project 2025 on the campaign trail, his Cabinet includes authors of this policy blueprint. And in less than a year, the administration has moved forward with nearly half of Project 2025's goals, including over 40% of the policies aimed at the Department of Education.

If the Department of Education can no longer resolve discrimination complaints within the agency, students will be left to pursue their claims directly in federal court. But the numbers show why that path cannot absorb the caseload.

In 2024, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights received 22,687 discrimination complaints, including nearly 12,000 related to Title IX. By comparison, federal courts in 2024 nationwide heard fewer than 1,000 education-related civil rights cases.

Federal courts are understaffed, and even if federal judges had the capacity to absorb 20 times more cases, most students simply cannot afford that path. Lawsuits demand lawyers, months of preparation and often years before any resolution.

The Office for Civil Rights offers something fundamentally different from going to court. It provides low-cost investigations, mediation that could resolve cases in weeks instead of years. Its settlements address not just individual harm but institutional failures.

Some cases drag on, but students do not need lawyers, and the OCR often secures broader reforms through negotiated settlements — from campuswide training programs to complete overhauls of complaint procedures.

The office also published policy guidance and answered more than 11,000 public inquiries in 2024, providing clarity for schools and students alike. These tools didn't eliminate the backlog, but they showed that the OCR could deliver meaningful results without the cost and delay of court.

But this system is exactly what's at risk if Project 2025's vision becomes reality. If the OCR loses its authority to resolve complaints, students will lose the only clear path to quick, affordable results and reliable information.

What this means for students

For schools and their students, that shift away from federal agencies would be dramatic. It would mean no more negotiated agreements, no more policy guidance, and no administrative investigations into systemic issues. Courts would decide what Title IX means, forcing students to file expensive lawsuits that drag on for years and require much stronger evidence of discrimination than the Office of Civil Rights ever demanded.

The administration has offered an alternative: "return our students to the states," as President Donald Trump put it on March 20, 2025, when he signed the executive order outlining his plan to close the Department of Education.

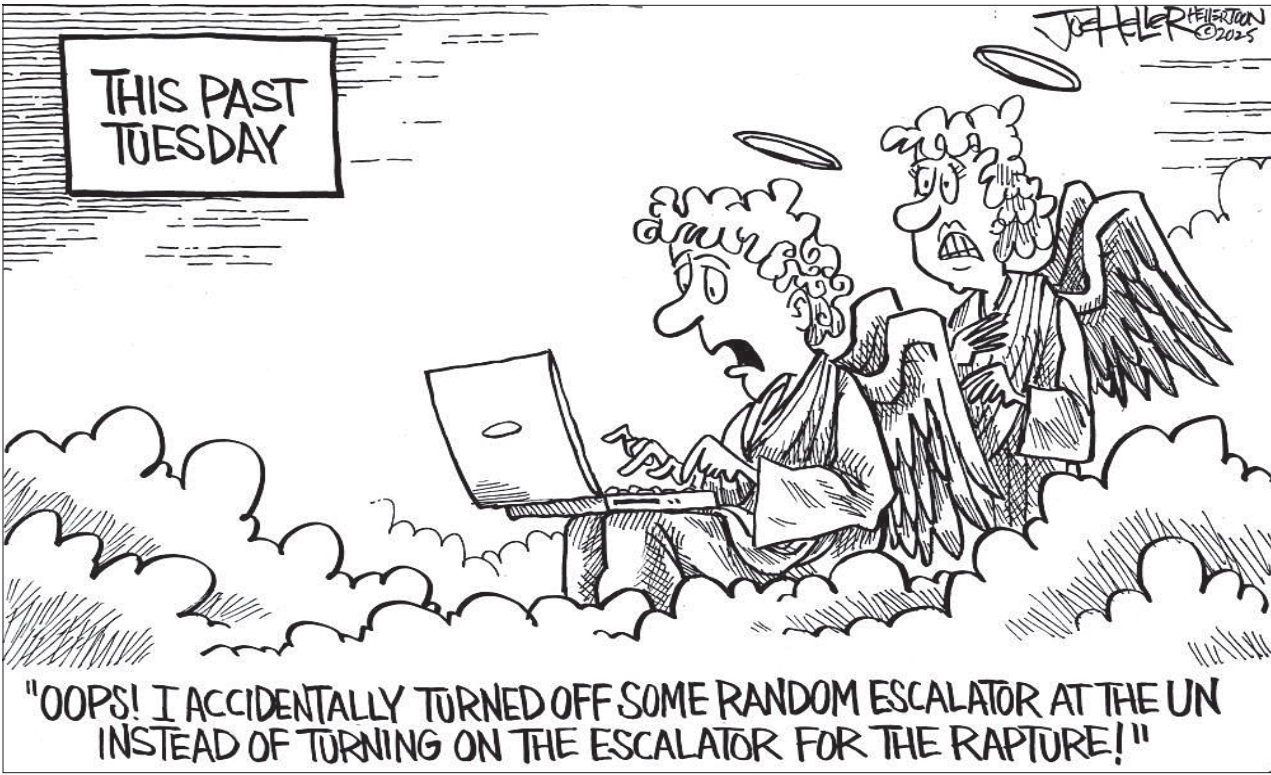
But states cannot fill the enforcement gap left by eliminating the Office for Civil Rights' role in resolving complaints and guiding schools. The OCR had the infrastructure to investigate cases, mediate disputes and issue clear policy guidance — capacities that most states simply do not have.

State laws addressing sexual discrimination in education vary dramatically — some provide strong protections, while others offer only limited coverage or lack enforcement mechanisms altogether. Kansas, for example, has antidiscrimination laws that do not explicitly cover education, leaving it unclear whether any state agency can investigate student complaints.

And in half the country, LGBTQ+ students still lack explicit statutory protection. In practice, that means a student's rights depend less on Title IX itself than on where they happen to go to school.

— This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license. Tammi Walker joined the University of Arizona in the Fall 2018 as an Associate Professor of Law and Psychology. Professor Walker is an experienced litigator and a trained research psychologist with an interest in procedural fairness and the administration of justice.

OTHER VIEWS



KANSAS PROFILE:

Jean Goslin, Kansas/American Agri-Women

By: Ron Wilson

Let's go to inner city New York, where a teacher is using rooftop gardens to help her students learn about seeds and plants and other growing things.

Among the teaching aids she is using are playing cards developed by a national group of women who are advocating for agriculture. This group includes a woman from rural Kansas, and the group is having its national meeting in Kansas City in fall 2025.

Jean Goslin is president of Kansas Agri-Women, an organization that focuses on agricultural education, advocacy and professional and leadership development. Goslin grew up on a farm near Manhattan.

"Mom and Dad dairied and raised feeder pigs," she said. She went to Manhattan High and attended Kansas State University.

Her aunts were involved in a women's farm group that would become known as Kansas Agri-Women. That organization was founded in 1974.

Jean married Gene Goslin. In 2011, they moved near Dwight where they farm today. Dwight is a rural community of 217 people. Now, that's rural.

The Goslins have three grown children, a son Keith and daughters Jerilyn and Danielle. Jean got involved in Kansas Agri-Women, the state level affiliate of American Agri-Women. She has now served two stints as American

Agri-Women's national vice president of education.

"Our motto is 'From Producer to Consumer with Understanding,'" Goslin said. "We need to tell people our story."

Kansas Agri-Women's most visible project has been the roadside signs depicting a grocery bag with the message, "One Kansas Farmer feeds more than 155 people + You!"

While serving as national vice president of education, Goslin was in an AAW committee meeting where they were brainstorming ideas for additional fun ways to inform the public.

"Somebody had seen some customized playing cards," Goslin said. "They told me to run with it."

Goslin and her team developed a deck of playing cards with the AAW logo and agricultural facts on each card. "We have facts on there about everything from potatoes to corn to cattle to almonds," she said.

Those cards are now among the materials that AAW distributes to help build knowledge about agriculture. For example, these have been provided to teachers who participate in the Ag in the Classroom program.

"I really enjoyed being able to represent AAW at the national FFA convention," Goslin said. "When you talk to those kids, you come away thinking that we're going to be okay because of the high quality of the youth who are coming up."

Today, American

Agri-Women is the nation's largest coalition of farm, ranch, and agribusiness women with more than 20 affiliates and members in 42 states. In November 2025, the national convention of AAW will be held in Kansas City.

"We last hosted a national convention in Wichita in 2011," Goslin said. "We're excited that it will be in Kansas City, and Kansas Agri-Women will be helping."

In addition to business meetings, the group will tour the new American Royal facilities and present an award to the Peterson Farm Brothers for their outstanding agricultural outreach. "We hope more Kansas women will join us," Goslin said.

"I love the national AAW convention," Goslin said. "I've never gone to a convention where I didn't learn something new about a different kind of agriculture."

She enjoys the diversity of farm products and the camaraderie of the women. "We might have a different oar in the water but we're all going in the same direction," she said.

Goslin adds: "We've been able to make national connections. We have friends from Maine to California."

For more information, see [www.americanagri-women.org](http://www.americanagri-women.org).

Goslin was handing out the agricultural playing cards at an Ag in the Classroom conference where she asked teachers how they will use them. One teacher said she was



Jean Goslin

using these materials as a teacher in inner-city New York, helping her students learn about horticulture using urban rooftop gardens.

We commend Jean Goslin and all the volunteers of American Agri-Women for making a difference with their advocacy and education. We can learn a lot about agriculture if we play our cards right.

— Ron Wilson is director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University. The mission of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development is to enhance rural development by helping rural people help themselves. The Kansas Profile radio series and columns are produced with assistance from the K-State Research and Extension Department of Communications News Media Services unit.

Shutdown Theater, Briar Patch Edition

By: Thomas L. Knapp

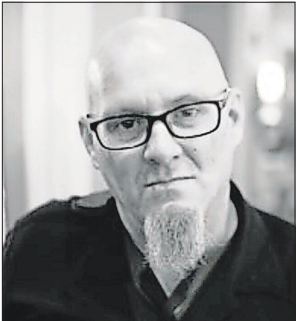
"The White House budget office," CNN reports, "is telling federal agencies to prepare plans for mass firings in the event of a government shutdown ..."

Programs that these fake "shutdowns" don't normally affect would "be targeted for sweeping reductions in force that could permanently eliminate jobs that are deemed 'not consistent' with President Donald Trump's priorities."

The headline characterizes Trump's latest move as a "threat" intended to encourage Democrats to capitulate, and dissident Republicans to get back on side, in the latest fight over government spending.

Threat? Maybe to Democrats who can't bear the thought of any reduction, in any government function, ever.

Maybe to Republicans



who have pet programs they know would be affected by "reductions in force."

The rest of us should reply as Br'er Rabbit did to Br'er Fox's threat to cook him and eat him: "Oh, Br'er Fox, I don't care what you do with me, so long as you just don't throw me in that briar patch over there."

The two wings of America's single-party state, and their pet media, treat the threat of a "government shutdown" as existential, and spend a lot more time trying to pre-emptively apportion blame to each other than trying to do a deal.

In reality, these "shutdowns" are pure Hollywood magic, all special effects -- no animals or bureaucrats were harmed in this production."

Supposedly "non-essential" government operations shut down, raising the question of why, if they're not "essential," taxpayers subsidize them in the first place, and making it clear that "non-essential" actually means "provides the best material to elicit public notice. "You can't visit your favorite museum ... THIS week."

When a deal gets made, all those "non-essential" operations re-open, complete with turning the government employees' time off into a retroactive paid vacation.

And the "spending exceeds revenues, guess we have to borrow!" can gets kicked down the road some more.

Trump's "threat" is that

instead of temporarily shutting down some "non-essential" fat, he'll carve some real meat off the federal government bone.

Good! Do it!

For once, let's see how small the federal government can get before anything "essential" actually stops happening.

My guess is that if a black hole opened up beneath the District of Columbia and sucked the entire federal government into non-existence, we'd suffer a very short period of re-adjustment before most people realized we're better off that way.

Please, Br'er President, anything but the briar patch!

—Thomas L. Knapp (Twitter: @thomaslknapp) is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism (thegarrisoncenter.org).

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