

## **Patsy Mink: To Change The Future**

On April 19, 1967, Katherine Switzer became the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon. A student at Syracuse University, she was forced to practice with the men's cross country team, as there was no women's team. Regardless, she persisted and completed the race, even after the male race director attempted to forcibly stop her. (New York Road Runners) Today, Syracuse houses a robust D1 women's cross country team. This change did not occur by chance, it was only possible through the establishment of Title IX by congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink. Title IX is a federal law that states, "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" (US Department of Justice [DOJ], 1972).

Representative Mink was no stranger to a world that did not accept her. As a Japanese-American woman, she faced discrimination and prejudice from birth. Born December 6, 1927, she was raised on the Hawaiian island of Maui and graduated as valedictorian of Maui High School class of 1944 (Alexander). While it is easy to assume Mink would have no issue finding success, that is far from the truth. After graduating college, Mink set out to fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a doctor. She faced rejection from every single medical school she applied to simply because she was a woman. At this time, there was no law put in place that prevented schools from rejecting applicants based exclusively off of unfair admissions criteria, such as race or sex. Schools had complete free control over who they decided to accept. While at this point many would have given up, Mink simply shifted gears and applied to law school

instead, determined to make a positive impact on the world. She was accepted into the University of Chicago, granted admission based on the school's mistaken assumption that her last name meant that she was an exchange student (Bell).

Attending law school and becoming an attorney became her official entrance into the world of politics. In 1964, Mink was elected to Congress to represent the relatively new state of Hawaii. It is from this seat that Mink built her legacy. After “sponsoring legislation creating bilingual education, student loans, special education, and Head Start” and even briefly running for President, Mink moved on to perhaps her greatest contribution to society: Title IX (Wallace). Written alongside Rep. Edith Green and Sen. Birch Bayh, Title IX was primarily written and sponsored by Mink (Women's Sports Foundation). This law prevented sex-based discrimination in “any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” and had arguably the largest impact on women's sports (DOJ, 1972).

Officially signed into law on June 23, 1972 by President Richard Nixon, Title IX began the process of breaking down an institutionalized and heavily fortified system of misogyny in the U.S. Of course, Mink's act of courage was not achieved without overcoming fervent opposition. College athletic directors pushed back against Title IX, worried it would tarnish the perception of men's athletics (Winslow). At the time, professional sports past college was seen as an all-male domain. Many believed that women participated in sports for “fun” but only men could use their athletic support and training after graduation.

As President Kennedy stated in his book *Profiles in Courage*, “The same basic choice of courage or compliance continually faces us all.” Few embodied this quotation more than Patsy

Mink. Throughout her life, Mink was continuously denied opportunities, because of both her race and her gender. Instead of complying and accepting, Mink fought back and established ground-breaking legislation affecting a huge portion of the country. More than just resisting on just her account, Mink fought for the rights of all women – and she succeeded.

Since its enactment, Title IX has left a tangible and lasting impact on our country as we know it. In 2026, it seems incomprehensible that colleges were legally well within their right to reject well qualified applicants simply because they were women. But for women before 1972, that was widely accepted. At the passing of Title IX, 300,000 women and girls participated in high school and college athletic programs. By 2022, this number had surpassed 3,000,000 (Rios).

Mink knew first hand how society treated women unfairly. She saw it time and again in her life, and the lives of women all around her. By continuing to push for the rights secured in Title IX, Mink demonstrated courage because she was well aware she lived in a society where many would resist being pushed forward. Mink herself summarized her crowning achievement as follows: “I can’t change the past. But I can certainly help somebody else in the future, so they don’t have to go through what I did” (Rios).

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