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**Heller to NCAA President: Go to Your Board and Demand Change**

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Today, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) submitted the following statement for the record at a U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation hearing titled "Promoting the Well-Being of Academic Success of College Athletes."



[**Click here to watch video**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f3wFmB9vIM&feature=youtu.be)

**Remarks as prepared:**

Thank you Chairman Rockefeller.

I appreciate the hearing today on the welfare of student athletes. It is important to have a better understanding of the academic and athletic benefits that are acceptable and unacceptable for schools to offer to student athletes and whether the NCAA can handle the responsibility entrusted to it by the Presidents of the participating Universities to fairly enforce that standard.

I am a sports fan. Have been my whole life. I have always enjoyed college sports because it was about the school on the front of the jersey and not the name on the back.

I strongly believe that for many student athletes, the accessibility and affordability of a world class education at a 4 year University that a scholarship offers is life changing.

In fact, on the whole, I believe many student athletes would say they have had a good experience.

Most people see their sports careers end at high school; these talented students get to continue to compete on next level in many sports that actually cost the University to compete.

So there is no doubt that the opportunity to gain access to a World Class University because of your athletic talent is a ticket to a better future and as we discuss this issue today, I want the Committee to remember that.

Now, with that being said;

Billions of dollars are coming in from television contracts for college football and basketball. College sports fans are more invested than ever in the outcome of their alma mater or adopted team. Millions of dollars from merchandise, tickets, and even video games have turned an amateur sports performance into a lucrative money making machine for some Universities.

These developments have ignited a debate amongst many sports fans watching in their homes, at a friend’s house, or in person. With so much money coming in to the Universities’ coffers, should more be allowable for the student-athletes, some of whom are the reason money is flooding in, in the first place?

Can this be done while still ensuring amateur competition is a fair playing field? If one school was allowed to offer lucrative packages for student athletes or their parents such as, money or a trip, I think it would be unfair to the schools that could not or would not offer that.

Schools offering more incentives would attract more talent and would theoretically, win more often. Those wins would translate into more money for that University. Either from a larger fan following, larger payouts from big games or higher numbers of applicants who want to study at a school with a winning sports program and larger exposure.

Given that logic the University Presidents (who run the NCAA) should espouse a belief that there must be some level of fairness, that college athletics is not professional sports and there must be restrictions on what every student athlete can receive from the school they attend and from the community they live in.

But that is not to say there are not additional benefits both in academic and athletic support. For example, athletes at many Universities have access to tutors who will provide individual time with an athlete that many in the general student body do not have access to. Athletes also have access to weight rooms, world-class athletic facilities that can be incredibly state of the art, and outfitted with training staff.

These benefits help the student athlete in the classroom.

But, many of these benefits also enhance a student athlete’s performance so they can be best prepared to represent their school on the playing field, so that they can better perform for the University to generate additional revenue.

So we aren’t debating whether student athletes get additional benefits. They do.

We are debating whether the current set of rules that govern the NCAA are outdated for the college sports world that exists.

I understand we must keep the rules fair for competition but more can be done for these student athletes to help them with their education and with their sports and still keep the integrity of the game.

Let’s face it, some Universities, either through their conference or by themselves are bringing in millions of dollars from television contracts and licensing rights.

With so much money coming in, and the NCAA’s failure to reform their rigid rules, the NCAA has now been accused of making money off these players and exploiting them.

Those accusations are probably why we are having this hearing today and why Mr. Branch is here.

And the NCAA has done themselves no favors. There have been recent decisions that just do not make any sense.

For example, Colgate freshman Nathan Harries was denied a year of eligibility for playing three games in an unsanctioned church league. Harries spent two years on a Mormon mission in Raleigh, N.C. Upon his return home, he played three games in a league at Dunwoody Baptist Church. Apparently, that violated an NCAA rule that stipulates that athletes who do not enroll immediately after graduating from high school will be penalized one year of eligibility for every academic year they participate in organized competition (which includes an official score and referees). Colgate asked for a waiver, which was denied, and appealed the decision.

Steven Rhodes served his country for 5 years as a United States Marine. Post-service, the 24-year-old enrolled at Middle Tennessee University and joined the football team as a walk-on. The NCAA decided that Steven wasn’t eligible to play the 2013 season because he participated in a military-only recreational league in 2012. Even though it was a loosely-run league that sometimes went six weeks between games, the NCAA said that because the teams kept score and there were uniforms and referees, the league counts as “organized competition.”

These situations were later revisited and fixed in one way or another.

In November 2013, a subcommittee was scheduled to hear the appeal from Colgate, but an NCAA official contacted the school Thursday after various media reports detailing Harries' case. The NCAA conducted a brief interview with Harries and immediately called back with news it had reversed its decision.

In August 2013, the NCAA reversed its decision on Steven Rhodes, immediately granting permission to Rhodes to play and maintaining his eligibility for 5 years.

I was pleased, the NCAA eventually overturned these decisions but the damage from the negative press the NCAA received was already done.

It shined a light on what many college sports fans already believed, that the NCAA rules are outdated for the college sports world that exists today.

The rules do not bend to circumstances.

Mr. Emmert, I think you know this.

In speaking to UNLV and UNR and USC, they all have argued that sports is a wonderful part of their college campus and it is a way to provide a world class education to a student that otherwise may not have that opportunity.

I agree with them that a college athletic scholarship is a wonderful opportunity. But I also know that the NCAA needs to do more for the student athlete.

This leads me to my point, the University Presidents run the NCAA. The NCAA cannot do much without their approval.

Why can’t they ensure that a student athlete is getting the education they were promised and the integrity of the game they are playing is be preserved so that all schools have a fair shot at competing.

Mr. Emmert, go to your board and demand change.

Tell them that the inability to adapt to the challenges of billion dollar TV contracts, academic fraud charges and additional publicity on every sanction decision the NCAA makes is why you find yourself before us today asking you whether the NCAA can do its job of protecting the welfare of the student-athlete. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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