

STATEMENT BY REP. TIM ROEMER (D-IN) BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION, MARCH 29, 2000

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of legislation which Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Leahy, and Rep. Lindsey Graham and I have introduced, to prohibit legal gambling on high school, collegiate and Olympic sporting events.

In my home state of Indiana, we take our high school and college sports very seriously. You can't get a ticket to a high school basketball game in my district on a Friday night, or to a Notre Dame football game on a Saturday afternoon. They are sold out for months and even years in advance.

Why is that? What's the magic of high school and collegiate sports that attracts so many student-athletes to compete, and draws so many fans to watch?

To me, it's the purity and uncertainty of amateur sports. In an era of movies and computer games, where the outcomes are scripted in advance, you just don't know what's going to happen when a 17-year old boy or girl steps to the line to attempt a game-winning foul shot or to kick a field goal. Your home team may win, they may lose, but at least you know the players tried their best in the pure

spirit of competition.

Today, that purity is being threatened by the growing influence of gambling. Not by small-time office betting pools or parking lot wagers, but by high-stakes, legal, government-sanctioned gambling: some \$1 billion worth last year alone on college sports.

As long as that kind of big money is out there, and sports betting is both legal and indeed encouraged by the government, the temptation to shave points or throw a game will always be there. We will no longer know if a player misses a layup, or drops a pass deliberately, or if he just plain misses. And once we lose that certainty, we will no longer know if amateur sports are still an act of competition, or just another act that has been scripted not in Hollywood, but in the back rooms of the legal betting parlors.

We are not proposing to ban gambling or even to ban all sports betting. If this bill passes, there will still be plenty of venues available for people to gamble, including the entire range of professional sports. We are simply trying to put the segment of amateur athletics that is played predominantly by teenagers off-limits when it comes to government-sanctioned gambling.

This is the responsible thing to do. It will help protect the integrity of

amateur sports from the growing and increasingly negative influence of sports betting. Just as importantly, it will send a strong signal to the American public that we will not tolerate betting on teenagers.

I understand that illegal sports betting is a serious concern, and I agree that we need to do more to address this problem. But the fact remains that gambling on student-athletes, whether legal or illegal, threatens the integrity of college sports. You can't wage an effective campaign against illegal sports betting, or even expect people to take this problem seriously, as long as the government continues to sanction legal sports betting.

When you talk to the people who are most affected by sports betting, you find that coaches, student-athletes and university presidents all support a ban on legal sports betting. They know firsthand how pervasive the sports betting problem has become, and the threat it poses to the integrity of their athletic programs and the student-athletes who participate in them.

That's why our bill is the number one priority of the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the nearly 1,000 colleges and universities it represents. It is supported by our nation's most respected college football and basketball

coaches, 65 of whom recently signed a letter to Congress urging passage of our bill.

It is supported by the Division I, II and III student athlete advisory councils, which represent most of our nation's college athletes, and by 33 other major organizations representing coaches, athletes, athletic administrators, teachers, and presidents at the university, college, junior college and high school levels.

Moreover, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission spent two years studying the effects of legalized gambling, and recommended that **“the betting on collegiate and amateur athletic events that is currently legal be banned altogether.”** Our bill is in response to the Commission's recommendations.

As Fr. Edward Malloy, President of the University of Notre Dame, recently observed: “Nothing scares me more than the potential harm unfettered gambling creates. Scandals erode confidence that what's taking place is a ‘real’ event. If people begin to believe college athletics are scripted, then why should anybody come to the games? And how is that in any way consistent with what we stand for as an academic institution?”

Congress took the first step in 1992 by voting to prohibit legal sports betting

in 46 states. It's time now to finish the job. Let's end legal sports betting and put the emphasis back where it belongs: on athletes playing their best, not placing their bets. On beating the competition, not beating the spread.

Think back for a moment on some of the greatest moments in our nation's sporting history: tiny Milan High's remarkable triumph in the Indiana state basketball championship, the U.S. men's hockey team's improbable victory over the Russians, Kerri Strug's courageous vault to win the Olympic gold medal. These events captivated our imagination because they were real and unexpected.

If we allow amateur sports to become scripted, that magic will be gone. Let's pass this legislation and keep high school and collegiate sports as an institution, which all Americans—coaches, players and fans alike—can value and trust. Thank you.