

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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AND
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INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE
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THE AMATEUR STUDENT-ATHLETE INTEGRITY ACT, S. 718

Chairman McCain, Senators Hollings, Brownback, Edwards and other distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today on a matter of concern to the Knight Commission and the larger higher education community – gambling on college sports.

In 1989, as a decade of highly visible scandals in college sports drew to a close, the trustees of the John S. and James L Knight Foundation were concerned that athletics abuses threatened the very integrity of higher education. A Louis Harris poll that year found that eight out of ten Americans agreed that intercollegiate sports had gotten out of control, that athletics programs were being corrupted by big money, and that the many cases of serious rules violations had undermined the traditional role of universities as places where young people learn ethics and integrity.

In October 1989, Knight Foundation created a commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and directed it to propose a reform agenda for college sports.

On announcing the creation of the Commission, James L. Knight, then chairman of the Knight Foundation said, “We hope this commission can strengthen the hands of those who want to curb the abuses which are shaking public confidence in the integrity of not just big-time collegiate athletics but the whole institution of higher education.”

In a cover story shortly before the first Commission meeting was convened, *Time* magazine described the problem as “an obsession with winning and moneymaking that is pervading the noblest ideals of both sports and education in America.”

Over the next five years, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics went on to examine a broad array of problems that were threatening the integrity and future of amateur athletics, producing three reports that helped focus the debate and mapped out a strategy of reform that eventually guided the athletics reform movement of the 1990s.

The Commission laid out an analysis of the problems facing college sports and proposed a “new model for intercollegiate athletics.” The reform agenda proposed was known as the “one-plus-three-model” – presidential control directed toward academic integrity, financial integrity, and independent certification. Throughout the 1990s, most of the Knight Commission’s recommendations were adopted, including a change in the governance structure of the NCAA, placing presidents in charge of the planning and policy activities of athletics programs. In 1996, shortly after this monumental change was adopted, the Knight Commission retired.

As the 10th anniversary of the Commission’s first report in March 1991 approached, the original members decided to reconvene for a fresh look at what has happened in this intervening decade and to assess the state of college athletics at the beginning of this new century. We wondered has the situation improved or worsened? Were there new problems that warranted our attention?

The short answer is YES. Over the past year, members of the previous Commission and new members of the higher education community joined together to meet and assess where intercollegiate athletics is today. We heard from NCAA representatives, university presidents, conference commissioners, athletics directors, coaches, athletes, professional sports executives, television officials, leaders of national higher education association leaders and others as we mapped a strategy to address continuing problems in athletics and new issues that threaten the integrity of collegiate athletics.

As we did ten years ago, next month, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics will release a report – this one concentrating on the impact and control of major college sports played at the most competitive level with a call to action on several fronts.

One of the recommendations that the Commission will make is related to gambling on college sports. The report will state that gambling is a constant danger to college sports and should be illegal in every state in the nation. Further, we will recommend that newspapers voluntarily discontinue the print of betting lines for college contests. We heard compelling evidence that lead us to make these recommendations.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, existing federal law prohibits betting on college sporting events in virtually every state in the nation. S. 718 will complete the job started in 1992 with the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (P.L. 102-559) by removing the exemption that allows sports books in Nevada to continue accepting bets on college sports. This exemption hasn’t worked for college sports and puts the young people who play the games in an untenable position.

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission, comprised of bipartisan members appointed by the President, House and Senate, recommended in its report to Congress in June 1999 that all currently legal betting on college sports be banned. The Commission concluded that legal gambling in Nevada “fuels a much larger amount of illegal sports wagering.”

Two of the most recent college game-fixing scandals involved wagers placed legally in Nevada casinos (Northwestern University and Arizona State University).

Although rare, there have been more gambling-related problems in college sports in the 1990s than in every other decade before it combined.

Until recently, Nevada, the only state where legal gambling on college sports is allowed, prohibited wagering on teams within the state, whether they played at home or are on the road outside the state. According to this state's Gaming Control Board, this prohibition was enacted to protect its own institutions and student-athletes against point-shaving schemes. The Knight Commission learned that the Nevada policy was changed in January 2001 after the NCAA and Senator Brownback and others asked that the same protections be extended to other institutions—Nevada reversed the policy and now allows gambling on its own teams. In our view this is exactly the wrong thing to do. It is clearly not in the best interests of college sports.

Research indicates that sports-gambling is a gateway for youth to other forms of problem betting and that the recent Gallup Poll reports that teenagers say they start betting on college sports at age 10. Most don't know it is illegal. In addition, the public is on our side. While two-thirds of Americans approve of legalized gambling in general, a June 1999 Gallup survey showed that 66% of those surveyed said betting on sports events leads to cheating or 'fixing' games and that 57% of adults oppose legalized betting on sports events as a way to raise state revenues. Of the adults surveyed, 91% said they did not bet on college sporting events.

Legal betting on college sports in Nevada is substantial, but it represents a relatively small amount when compared to overall gross revenues. Discontinuation of college sports betting in Nevada should not result in a loss of jobs for this growing industry. The potential cost to the integrity of collegiate athletics, however, is devastating.

In a September 25, 2000 *Time* magazine article on the legislative efforts to pass this legislation last Congress, stated:

“In the 1990s, when gambling on college sports became a major attraction at Las Vegas casinos – the betting action topped \$2 billion a year, and the NCAA basketball championship rivaled the Super Bowl as the single largest gambling event – more college athletes were involved in fixing games or wagering on college teams than in any other decades before legalized gaming became popular.”

On behalf of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, we endorse S. 718 and urge this Committee to adopt it.

I would be pleased to answer questions about our position on this legislation.

Thank you.