

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Press Conference on the Protect College Sports Act

September 14, 2026

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Well, good afternoon. I'll try to be brief because I really want to hear from the rest of the speakers who've joined us here today, and we are joined by student athletes from across the spectrum of athletic endeavors. I say that because it can't just be about the athletes that get paid.

It has to be about the 500,000 athletes that are in sports that may never get the revenue sharing or the recognition, but are critical to our ecosystem. So we appreciate that there is such diversity behind us. Secondly, I want to thank the coaches for being here because they too represent part of this ecosystem, and I want to thank specifically Mark Few.

So proud of him making the Basketball Hall of Fame this year and being part of our U.S. Olympic team. I'm so glad Coach Bohl is here, [and Coach] Calipari, and also [want] to make sure that Coach Sampson knows how much we appreciate him.

So, as my colleague said, this is a bipartisan issue, both Democrats and Republicans, and we have some of our colleagues here today to show that bipartisan support.

This is about reining in the bad practices that are happening in college sports today – the runaway costs that are sending people to the state legislature, asking for bailout[s] from taxpayers to pay for sports, asking people to take endowment funds that really should go to things like wheat research or AI, and instead have to be spent [on sports] because of the runaway arms race in sports spending.

The statistics show that the majority of college athletic departments right now can't make ends meet, and the 300% increase in what is called recruitment is because we don't have the right rules in place to make sure that while athletes are paid, there is a fair game and everyone abides by those rules.

It is not acceptable for this bill to be attacked by those who support agents who want to make outrageous sums of money and prey on high school students, hoping that they can make a buck and then leaving those students without a real future in college sports.

I'm asking my colleagues to join us in fixing what's wrong with college sports today, and make this institution that has produced such great leaders for our country a winnable hand for the future of college sports.

Now, Coach Few and Coach Sampson will remember this moment. Gonzaga played Houston several years ago. At the end of the game, one of the students who played for Gonzaga, Khalif Battle, was pretty upset that Gonzaga lost. Have to say, Mark, I was too.

But Coach Sampson on the opposite team, put his arm around Khalif Battle, and said, "Son, you will have future days." And that small gesture is what sports is all about. It really is.

It is about the humanity of us building teams of people to work together in endeavors and having a shot at a real future. We're asking Congress to give us that shot, to put an arm around this bill, and help us get it over the goal line and onto the president's desk. Thank you.

Senator Cantwell Additional Remarks

[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: So, can I just add quickly? There are two things that are very important in the bill. First of all, it is a first-time federal statute on the rights of students to earn NIL and revenue sharing. So, a historic recognition of both of those rights.

Secondly, it's a federal preemption. So, states who have lesser standards will have to meet this federal obligation, and we basically outlawed duplicitous practices that some agents and others are using to short-term the economic opportunities of athletes. So we are working hard to make solid protections for their economic future.