



**Written Testimony of Teresa Gould, Pac-12 Conference, Commissioner  
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**

**Hearing on “Protecting College Sports: Supporting Student Athletes,  
Restoring Fair Competition, and Saving the Games Fans Love”**

**June 3, 2026**

**1. Witness Introduction & Opening Statement**

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the future of college athletics, an industry in which I have served for more than 36 years. I also want to thank Senators Cruz, Cantwell, Coons, and Schmitt for their leadership in introducing the Protect College Sports Act and for their commitment to addressing the significant challenges facing college athletics.

I currently serve as commissioner of the Pac-12 Conference. Since assuming this role in March of 2024 as the first-ever woman to lead an autonomy conference, I have had the unique responsibility of serving as commissioner of three different versions of the Pac-12 in less than two years. I first led the conference through unprecedented realignment as 10 member institutions representing nearly 6,000 student-athletes departed for new leagues, then steered the conference through a transitional period and unknown future for two members in Oregon State and Washington State Universities and approximately 1,000 student-athletes who were left without a league home, and today I am leading the development of a new, reimagined Pac-12 that will launch for the coming 2026-27 season with nine member institutions. Across nearly four decades in college athletics, including leadership roles with the Pac-12, UC Davis, UC Berkeley, the West Coast Conference, ESPN Regional Television, and the Midwestern Collegiate Conference, I have witnessed significant change in our industry. However, no period has been more transformative than the one we are experiencing today. My experience navigating the evolution of the Pac-12 has provided a firsthand view of both the opportunities and the challenges confronting college athletics and

reinforced the need for thoughtful, sustainable reform that preserves the educational mission of collegiate sports, while supporting student-athlete success.

For more than a century, the Pac-12 has been a leader in collegiate athletics, winning more national championships than any other conference in the country, placing more student-athletes in the Olympic Games than many nations worldwide, and helping shape many of the policies and practices that define the modern student-athlete experience. It was the first conference to include student-athletes in governance and the first to establish a conference-wide health and well-being initiative that became a model for the nation. The conference led groundbreaking efforts on post-participation medical care, guaranteed scholarships, and mental health resources, helping set standards that have since been adopted across college sports.

The conference's commitment to equity and visibility has also been unmatched. Through Pac-12 Networks, more than half of all broadcasts featured women's sports—an achievement no other conference or network has approached—and a reflection of the league's long-standing belief that all student-athletes deserve meaningful opportunities to compete, be seen, and be celebrated.

Like much of college athletics, the Pac-12 has faced unprecedented disruption through conference realignment and the loss of long-standing members, rivalries, and traditions. Yet throughout periods of change, the conference has remained resilient, innovative, willing to challenge convention, while at all times being guided by our north star which is to support our student-athletes. The Pac-12 has often found itself at the center of the most consequential issues in college sports, serving as a defendant in landmark antitrust litigation, including the House case, student-athlete employment status litigation, and other major cases that have helped redefine the rights and opportunities of student-athletes.

Today, the Pac-12 is undertaking a reimagining of what a modern athletic conference can be. Building on its historic foundation while embracing the realities of a rapidly evolving landscape, the conference is creating a vision designed for today's student-athlete and tomorrow's opportunities. The goal is not simply to preserve a legacy, but to build a new model that connects institutions, student-athletes and fans to an unexpected experience and future, one built for the modern-day student-athlete.

The Pac-12 remains uniquely positioned in college athletics. It combines a history of autonomy and leadership, a geographic footprint that bridges regions and markets—including member institutions in California, Texas and Washington—and a proven willingness to lead through change. As college sports enters a new era, the Pac-12 intends to help shape that future with the same pioneering spirit that has defined its past.

Today, as the Pac-12 builds its future, we remain committed to the same core principle that has guided the conference throughout its history: providing student-athletes with opportunities to compete, earn a degree, and thrive both during and after their athletic careers. That perspective informs my testimony today.

## **2. The Current Landscape**

College athletics is at a pivotal moment, facing challenges that threaten both its educational mission and the well-being of student-athletes.

- The increasing commercialization of the system has contributed to significant pressures on student-athletes, including extensive travel demands, mental health concerns, and uncertainty surrounding roster movement. National transfer portal data shows that nearly half of student-athletes who enter the portal never find a new home, underscoring the importance of building a collegiate athletics model that prioritizes long-term student-athlete success, stability, and support.
- At the same time, inconsistent state laws and a seemingly endless cycle of litigation have created a fragmented and uncertain regulatory environment.
- Financial pressures continue to mount as athletics department debt grows, while Olympic and women's sports face disproportionate risks as institutions seek ways to manage escalating costs. The widening structural and financial advantages afforded to autonomy conferences further disadvantage institutions that remain deeply committed to investing in broad-based athletics programs and competing at a high level.
- These challenges extend beyond athletics itself, as strong athletic performance is closely correlated with increased student interest and enrollment—an especially important

consideration as colleges and universities across the country confront significant enrollment declines and demographic headwinds.

Together, these issues underscore the need for a sustainable, student-centered model that preserves opportunity, competitive equity, and the educational values at the heart of collegiate athletics.

### **3. Support for Protect College Sports Act**

We strongly support the Protect College Sports Act because it represents the most impactful and comprehensive reform proposal advanced to date to address the challenges facing college athletics. The Act provides enhanced protections and support for student-athletes, ensures a stronger and more meaningful student-athlete voice in future governance, and establishes a structure that preserves important optionality for pooled media rights, which would bring in additional revenue, helping preserve women's and Olympic sports, and providing lower-resourced conferences and institutions a better opportunity to compete at the highest level. We also support the Act's efforts to codify the House settlement as it was originally negotiated and intended by the parties less than one year ago, providing clarity and stability at a time when interpretations have reportedly drifted significantly from the agreement's original purpose. Equally important, the Act includes a limited and reasonable antitrust safe harbor that would allow college sports leaders to address the growing eligibility and transfer crisis while maintaining competitive opportunities for student-athletes.

Because many of the most significant challenges facing college sports cannot realistically be resolved in a single point in time, the Act's Commission on the Future of College Athletics is a thoughtful and critical framework which we must use to evaluate the deeper, structural reforms that will require sustained analysis, stakeholder engagement, and broad consensus. This effort should be led by a diverse and balanced body, which must meaningfully include student-athletes and ensure representation for the over 300 DI institutions, operating with strong accountability and transparency to ensure that future recommendations serve the long-term interests of student-athletes, institutions, conferences, and the collegiate model as a whole.

We are particularly encouraged by the Act's commitment to collaboration through this Commission, as the future success of college athletics will require partnership, innovation, and a shared commitment to preserving opportunities for student-athletes and institutions alike.

The Commission should prioritize examination of several fundamental issues that will shape the future of college athletics, including but not limited to the following:

- Student-athlete employment status and collective bargaining. Regarding this topic, the Pac-12 believes the industry should engage in this conversation honestly. Student-athletes today generate significant revenue and help define the identity of the conferences and institutions they represent. That honest conversation begins with recognizing that student-athletes deserve a meaningful and formal voice in the decisions that affect them, and building a structure that reflects it.
- Governance reforms that provide student-athletes with a genuine voice while ensuring greater diversity of perspectives across Division I.
- Pathways for institutions committed to investment to compete at the highest level.
- Commercial efficiencies and competitive opportunities for non-autonomy institutions.
- Sustainable competitive and financial models for institutions of varying resources.
- Innovative approaches to conference alignment and scheduling that reduce travel burdens and time away from campus and support student-athlete health and welfare, while preserving competitive opportunities. Efforts such as the Pac-12's men's soccer partnership with the Big West and our strategic use of affiliate membership models in sports like wrestling demonstrate the type of creative solutions that can preserve competitive opportunities while reducing strain on student-athletes.

The Protect College Sports Act represents the most comprehensive and meaningful effort to date to address these challenges. By strengthening protections for student-athletes, promoting greater governance stability, providing clarity around the implementation of the House settlement, and creating a framework for future reform, the Act takes an important step toward preserving the educational mission of college athletics while modernizing its structure for the future.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In closing, college athletics stands at a critical crossroads. The challenges facing the current model—from the erosion of the student-athlete experience and increasing financial pressures to regulatory fragmentation and growing competitive inequities—demand thoughtful,

comprehensive, and lasting solutions. The current system is placing unprecedented strain on institutions and student-athletes alike. The status quo is not sustainable. We should not continue to accept outdated assumptions when a better path forward is within reach.

The window for meaningful reform is short and the cost of inaction is real. Congress has an opportunity to modernize college athletics in ways that protect its traditions, strengthen its institutions and recognize the rights and protections that student-athletes have always deserved. The Pac-12 is committed to being part of that work.

Thank you again to Senators Cruz, Cantwell, Coons, and Schmitt for your leadership. We look forward to working with Congress, student-athletes, higher education leaders, and our colleagues across intercollegiate athletics to build a sustainable, student-centered model that preserves opportunity, competitive excellence, and the educational values that make college athletics one of our country's most cherished and distinctly American institutions.