

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Gus Bilirakis
CPAC Subcommittee Hearing on
**“A Level Playing Field: College Athletes’ Rights to Their Name,
Image, and Likeness”**
September 30, 2021

As prepared for delivery

Good morning everyone and welcome to today’s Subcommittee hearing.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for holding this hearing, and thank you to our witnesses for your testimony on this important matter. I am eager to hear each of your perspectives.

I also want to thank Congressman Gonzalez for your tireless bipartisan efforts to give student athletes the opportunity to receive compensation for their name, image, and likeness, or NIL. It’s not too often a Florida Gator and an Ohio State Buckeye can come together in the name of amateur sports, but I’m glad to be working with you on this and remain very hopeful we can get bipartisan legislation into the endzone this Congress.

To that end, I think we need to have realistic expectations for what our Committee should focus on when legislating to allow collegiate athletes the opportunity to capitalize on their NIL. It is the only way we can get this done for students.

Currently, 30 states across the country have their own laws allowing college athletes to monetize off their NIL, including my home state of Florida.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time a patchwork of state laws has caused potential confusion and crippled fair competition. We are currently seeing this same scenario play out with consumer privacy laws, so I am hopeful this hearing highlights the need for Congress to establish a national preemptive framework for

NIL and create a true level playing field for all students and educational institutions across the nation.

If Congress fails to enact legislation preventing a patchwork of state laws, we will likely see states competing with one another to create the best incentives for students to come to their schools. While *I know* young people want to come to my great state of Florida, we must be fair to the hundreds of other universities and colleges across the country that may be a better fit for student athletes.

To be clear, what I am suggesting is not an approach decided upon by the NCAA and various conferences but rather by collegiate athletes themselves. I recently received a letter from 15 collegiate athletes from the Atlantic Coast Conference that emphasized this point. The students say, "...it's clear we need a federal baseline that re-levels the playing field – and we need one soon."

The students also explain the most important factor in legislating on NIL is to protect all collegiate athletics, especially those outside of the big revenue generating sports like football and basketball, stating, "Congress would do a disservice to student-athletes, sports culture, and American society in general if it passes a bill that diminishes educational opportunities that leave schools no choice but to reduce scholarships or cut programs due to budget reallocations."

Madam Chair, I ask for unanimous consent that this letter be entered into the record.

I think these students know what they want. If we exceed the focus of this debate as well as go far outside the bounds of our Committee's jurisdiction, I fear we will end up hurting the college athletes and their chances of succeeding on and off the field. I also want to point out that these students didn't ask for healthcare mandates, or guaranteed scholarships, or for private rights of action. The risk of such factors will result in cutting the very sports programs we are working to

protect. After all, there is a difference between being a representative of a school and being a full-time employee of a school.

I agree wholeheartedly with these students: College students should be able to compete and work hard to receive NIL benefits, and that's what our Committee should focus on.

Thank you again, Madam Chair, and to our witnesses for being here, and I yield back.