

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Innovation, Data, and Commerce Ranking Member Jan Schakowsky

***Hearing on “Taking the Buzzer Beater to the Bank: Protecting College Athletes’ NIL
Dealmaking Rights.”***

March 29, 2023

Thank you, Chair Bilirakis, for your continued collaboration, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Throughout March, college students, alumna, and others gather as fans to cheer for their basketball teams. I was thrilled that this year, for the first time ever, both of Illinois’ Big Ten teams played in the NCAA men’s basketball tournament.

College sports bring joy to Americans in every state, in every Congressional district, and can provide lifechanging opportunity and friendships for college athletes. I know our colleague Ms. Trahan, and I am sure others have personally experienced this.

College sports have also generated enormous wealth, but that wealth has been unfairly distributed for decades. Those most responsible for the creation of this wealth, the players, have yet to receive their fair share of the pie. And if that isn’t bad enough, we have seen athletes deprived of basic compensation and benefits for their work in service of the amateurism myth.

For anyone who doubts me, think back to 2015, when Northwestern football players, who I have the privilege to represent, began a union drive. Regrettably, Northwestern employed the same anti-union tactics we see giant corporations like Amazon and Starbucks use to this day.

It is essential that college athletes not only have the right to benefit from their name, image, and likeness, but that they can bargain collectively for benefits, including short and long-term healthcare.

Under NCAA rules, athletes are required to have basic health insurance. However, schools are not required to provide that insurance. Unfortunately, the two health insurance options offered by the NCAA provide inadequate coverage and are time restricted. For some, those injuries last years after the end of a college athlete career.

For years, Congress was told by the NCAA and others to let them govern themselves. Only after a Supreme Court decision – and the passage of many state laws – did the NCAA begin allowing some college athletes to make money from their name, image, and likeness. However, huge disparities in compensation exist between athletes and the college sports machine and more needs to be done to ensure that players’ health and safety are put first.

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I look forward to engaging with Chair Bilirakis, Members on both sides of the aisle of this subcommittee, and all key stakeholders as we seek to correct past injustices and move forward in an equitable “player first” way. Again, thank you to the witnesses. I’ve read your testimony and I appreciate you being here. I must now run to a Budget Committee hearing to ask questions, but I will come right back.