

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Protect College Sports Act Floor Remarks
September 15, 2026
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. President. There's a lot to say in a short period of time, but we will be having a vote soon to proceed to the Protect College Sports Act, a bill that does deserve the attention of this institution.

There's lots of things I'd like to focus on. I didn't necessarily call the shot that we were having this vote, but I will tell you it is definitely worth proceeding to.

The importance of protecting college sports is about us working in a bipartisan basis with a variety of members on both sides of the aisle and working with universities across the United States and every conference and thousands of athletes who want to have a better system.

I think, Mr. President, the best thing I can do is to read from a business sports article by a key individual and so I'm going to do that.

This is Lamell McMorris, a graduate of Morehouse College, and for two decades [he] worked at the intersection of sports and politics, entertainment, community engagement and business.

He serves as the vice chair of the National Urban League of Board of Trustees, a board member of the National Action Network, and a former board member of the NAACP. But these views that he's expressing here, that was published yesterday, are his own.

So, quoting from him in his letter: *“College sports are in a freefall, and everyone inside the game knows it. Universities are borrowing and spending tens of millions just to keep up, while nonrevenue, women’s and Olympic sports are cut to feed football and men’s basketball. Courts, not campuses, increasingly decide who plays and where. Smaller schools have become unpaid development leagues for the giants.*

“I have spent my career on both sides of a table that rarely agree, as the founder of a sports agency representing athletes, including a No. 1 overall NFL draft pick, and as a graduate of Morehouse College who loves our historic[ally] Black institutions. From both chairs, I can tell you the status quo is unsustainable, and the [...] Protect College Sports Act is the best chance we have to fix it.

“Let me say something my former colleagues will not like: the agent world around these young athletes is largely unregulated, and too much of it preys on the very kids it claims to serve. In the pros, agent [fees] are capped around 5%; in college, some agents reportedly take 20-25% of an athlete’s NIL deal.

“Others push players into the transfer portal chasing an offer that never comes, and more than 40% of transfers each year risk losing their scholarships and support. I know this business. It is not built around the best interests of student-athletes, and this bill finally brings order to it.

“The legislation sets national rules everyone plays by. It protects Olympic and nonrevenue sports, invests in women’s athletics, strengthens health and safety, safeguards scholarships, and creates real accountability for schools and athletes alike. And it directs nearly a billion dollars over the next

six years into HBCUs, through the IGNITE investment in HBCU sports, media, journalism and broadband. It is why the United Negro College Fund and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, along with more than 360 schools and every major conference, support it. At a place like Morehouse, home to a sports-journalism program founded with Spike Lee, that money is generational.”

“I do not dismiss the people opposing this bill; several are friends and allies. The NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus have tied it to the fight over Black voting power. Let me be clear: Voting rights are sacred, and I will stand in that fight with anyone. But I cannot agree that the way to wage it is to hold thousands of student-athletes’ scholarships, health protections and futures hostage to a Supreme Court decision they did not make. Let us fight for voting rights with everything we have, and let us not make these young people the collateral.

“The other objection, pressed by organized labor, is that collective bargaining should fix all of this. I wish it were that simple. More than 80% of Division I schools are public institutions, and their athletes would be state employees, outside the reach of federal labor law and, in many states, barred from bargaining at all. A national bargaining system would require reopening New Deal-era statutes this Congress is not going to touch. Meanwhile, the protections in this bill are real, and they are available now.

“Is the bill perfect? No. I would still press the House for full funding for the HBCU investment, not a promise on paper. But I will not let the perfect be the enemy of the essential. This is the last, best chance to save college sports and to put HBCUs at the table where the future gets decided.”

“I have negotiated against institutions, and for the people they overlooked. From both chairs, the answer here is the same. Pass the Protect College Sports Act, in the Senate this fall and in the House right behind it. Student-athletes need protection, universities need a sustainable system, and our HBCUs deserve this investment. The time to act is now.”

Mr. President, this letter that I just read from Lamell McMorris, I think, is representative of all the issues combined in this legislation. I can just tell you that the unsustainable 300% increase in recruiting student athletes without the proper rules and regulation are bankrupting our higher education system.

Taxpayers are asked to foot the bill in higher tuition fees that students pay, who are not even athletes, [colleges] are going to state legislatures and asking for bailouts and they are using university funds that should go to research and putting them instead into what is an arms race.

This bill brings order to this. It helps women and Olympic sports and it sets up a commission to look at the real future, which I think should include collective bargaining for what college sports can be organized in the future.

But none of that can happen. And the 500,000 athletes that are at risk because thousands of them have already been cut from the system are just going to continue to see failure. The other night, I talked to the Pac-12 commissioner, who said I just met with all the student athletes in the Pac-12.

She said, “You know what the number one question I got from those student athletes was?” I said, “No, what?” They wanted to know whether their sport was still going to be there.

Mr. President, there's going to be a moment when the United States is standing at the Olympics, and we're not going to be winning gold or silver or bronze, because we're not going to have the athletes, because the collegia[te] system will have collapsed, and people won't be funding them because they will be in an arms race over football.

Let's bring some sanity. Recognize that athletes do deserve revenue sharing and that this bill will put that into law for the first time – the first time athletes will get a federal [protection] on NIL rights and revenue sharing that will be historic. Let's move forward.

I thank the President, and I yield the floor.