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Time for Action on NCAA Reform...

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The time for action on intercollegiate athletics reform is upon us and it will take lots of folks, each doing one very small thing to make change happen. Few people maintain that the NCAA is capable of reforming itself because its Division I Football Bowl Subdivision members hold voting control over the organization. Even the so-called Big Five conferences, who successfully sought legislative autonomy and received it in 2015, can exercise their power to get the NCAA to do whatever it wishes.

Neither the FBS nor the Big Five conferences have the best interests of all 480,000 NCAA athletes in mind. They freely use the threat of leaving the NCAA, thereby removing the financial underpinnings of the organization, to get their way which usually means limiting the share of NCAA Division I national championship distributions to other divisions, keeping the College Football Playoff money for themselves and advancing legislation which puts them in the best recruiting and revenue-production positions. Given this NCAA plutocracy – rule by a minority of the wealthiest institutions, acting in their own self interest – expecting NCAA to initiate reforms from within is nothing more than the proverbial “pipe dream”.

It’s time for Congress to carefully examine the NCAA to fully expose the roots of enforcement, athletes’ rights, academic integrity, exploitation of minority athletes, and monetary distribution unfairness issues. Solutions cannot be accomplished without full transparency – putting all the facts on the table. The current U.S. House of Representatives bill, H.R. 275 seeks to appoint a Presidential Commission to fully examine these issues and propose solutions. Such Congressional action is worthy of activist support. For a full copy of the bill, go to: https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/275

So, are you "in" as an activist? Which one of the following actions do you feel comfortable taking the time to do?

OPTION A: Write to your member of the House of Representative or, better yet, visit his or her local office and hand deliver your letter, asking to speak to the Representative or the Representative's legislative aide on education issues. Go to http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/ and enter your zip code to find your representative and a handy email form to use. Send the following or a similar message:

Dear Representative XXX,

I am a voting member of your District and would like to respectfully request that you become a co-sponsor of H.R. 275, a bi-partisan bill that would establish a Presidential Commission “to identify and examine issues of national concern related to the conduct of intercollegiate athletics and to make recommendations for the resolution of such issues.” The NCAA has failed to address critical issues currently confronting intercollegiate athletics: significant lapses of academic integrity, grave threats to the financial stability of athletic programs, the alarming escalation of coaches’ salaries, the escalation of student fees and institutional general fund subsidies to support athletics, failure to provide college athletes with necessary athletic injury protections, excessive athletics time demands that do not allow athletes to devote sufficient time to their academic studies, and failure to confront practices that compromise the health and safety of college athletes, among others. The NCAA is currently controlled by a minority of commercialized athletic programs and is incapable of examining or reforming itself. The academic integrity and reputation of our higher education institutions and the education, health and welfare of college athletes are too important to allow these questionable practices to continue. Further, the current NCAA Division I football and basketball “arms race” continues unabated, forcing many institutions to consider dropping non-revenue Olympic sports and ceasing their Title IX compliance efforts. An unbiased examination of these issues by Congress would be appreciated. Thank you for your attention to this request.

OPTION B: Consider asking your family and friends write to their respective members of Congress to co-sponsor and support H.R. 275. Send them a copy of the above instructions.

OPTION C: Contact your favorite faculty members and ask them to submit the following resolution for consideration of their respective faculty senates along with a copy of H.R. 275:

WHEREAS, [name of institution] is a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA); and
WHEREAS, the NCAA has failed to address critical issues currently confronting intercollegiate athletics: significant lapses of academic integrity, grave threats to the financial stability of athletic programs, the alarming escalation of coaches’ salaries, the escalation of student fees and institutional general fund

subsidies to support athletics, failure to provide college athletes with necessary athletic injury protections, excessive athletics time demands that do not allow athletes to devote sufficient time to their academic studies, and failure to confront practices that compromise the health and safety of college athletes, among others; and

WHEREAS, the academic integrity and reputation of our higher education institutions and the education, health and welfare of college athletes are too important to allow these questionable practices to continue.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Faculty Senate that the Senate go on record in support of H.R. 275, a bi-partisan bill being considered by the 114th Congress, that would establish a blue-ribbon Presidential Commission “to identify and examine issues of national concern related to the conduct of intercollegiate athletics and to make recommendations for the resolution of such issues.”

If your faculty senate acts, be sure to send a copy of the resolution to your U.S. representative.

Change is the result of persistence over time, with individuals each doing one small act to advance reform.

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