

National Blueprint for College Athletics

The Mission: Preserving College Sports

College sports is approaching a crisis and Congress has a generational opportunity to address an issue that millions of Americans—and thousands of student-athletes—care deeply about: the future of college sports. This blueprint outlines the core principles that Senator Eric Schmitt, a former college athlete, believes should be included in any meaningful college sports legislation.

Restoring order to today's chaotic college sports landscape requires action now. Without it, problems faced by fans, athletes, and institutions will escalate. Simply put, the current system is unsustainable.

Importantly, many of the ideas needed to move forward are already on the table. Through Chairman Cruz's leadership and ongoing work on this issue, along with some thoughtful approaches of Ranking Member Cantwell, a bipartisan framework can emerge from the Commerce Committee to serve as the foundation for legislation that fixes this issue once and for all.



Pillar 1: Secure Stability

"Ending Rulemaking by Lawsuit." The current environment of "policymaking by courtroom default" has created chaos and instability that is unsustainable.

- **Antitrust Safe Harbor:** Create a narrow, conditional safe harbor to allow schools and conferences to adopt uniform, athlete-protective rules without the threat of immediate, freezing litigation.
- **National Standards:** Replace the current patchwork of conflicting state NIL laws with one federal standard to ensure competitive balance.
- **Governance Flexibility:** Allow conferences to choose their own governing bodies under federal oversight, recognizing that, in a new era of college athletics, this may warrant a shifting governance model.

Pillar 2: Fix the Framework

“Putting players first, a Commonsense Approach.”

College sports must remain a "time-limited educational opportunity" rather than a short-term professional career.

- **One-Time Transfer Baseline:** Restore roster stability with a national one-time transfer rule, aligning athlete mobility with academic calendars. Governing bodies can grant waivers for coach movement and unforeseen circumstances.
- **Eligibility Guardrails:** Reaffirm eligibility standards to prevent older, professionalized rosters from displacing high school recruits and undermining development pathways.
- **Coaching Accountability:** Align coaching transitions with transfer windows to minimize disruption to athletes' academic and competitive lives.

Pillar 3: Protect Players and Non-Revenue Sports

"Saving Olympic and Women's Sports." Safeguard non-revenue sports by ensuring a certain number of varsity sports are maintained by schools.

- **Revenue Sharing and Caps:** Authorize direct compensation from schools to student-athletes and permit a governing body to adopt salary caps to ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- **Restoring NIL, Not Pay-for-Play:** The goal is to return NIL to its original purpose, marketable endorsements, while institutionalizing direct revenue sharing.
- **Bona Fide NIL:** Require verification that NIL compensation is for services rendered at fair market value, prohibiting "sham contracts" as an end-around salary cap.
- **Transparency in Contracts and Player Representation:** Protect student athletes from fraudulent deals and greedy agents by establishing a public registry and national standards.

Pillar 4: Put Fans First

“Ensuring College Sports Endure.” Beyond the challenges around NIL, Congress should take a hard look at the growing financial strain facing college sports. Senator Schmitt supports conducting hearings, reviewing legislative options, engaging key stakeholders to better understand potential revenue models, and what’s working and what isn’t working with the Sports Broadcasting Act, and related issues.

True debate is needed on this issue. It won’t be easy, there are strong and sensible positions on each side of this debate, but policymakers should ask a basic question: are college sports getting fair value for what they produce and what is the best way to ensure they are strong for the long-term to support a wide array of college athletics and student athletes who participate?

- **Maximizing Value in Media Rights:** College football consistently attracts large national audiences, yet overall media revenues don’t match those of other professional sports leagues. This gap suggests there are real opportunities to modernize and optimize media rights deals in ways that grow total revenue.

- **Restoring Stability:** Ongoing conference realignment shows schools are seeking greater financial predictability and competitive stability. Recent realignment decisions highlight the importance of examining what underlying financial incentives are driving these shifts.
- **Long-Term Success:** Discussions around any potential proposals that open up or amend the Sports Broadcasting Act should focus on keeping college athletics healthy for the long haul. Can a review of how media rights are secured provide more schools opportunities to be more competitive, protect women's and Olympic sports, and ensure long-term sustainability?

