

Congress Discusses NCAA Reforms

in Wake of Colorado Scandal

By JOSEPH WHITE - Associated Press

May 18, 2004

The NCAA's proposed reforms in the wake of the University of Colorado recruiting scandal came under critical review Tuesday from members of Congress.

"I'm concerned that some of the new proposals don't go far enough," Rep. Jan **Schakowsky**, D-Ill., said at a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing.

The committee, by coincidence of scheduling, met just hours after an investigative panel in Denver issued a scathing report that concluded that sex, alcohol and drugs were used to lure football recruits to Colorado. University President Betsy Hoffman will use the report to decide whether coach Gary Barnett and others will lose their jobs over the latest major scandal in college sports.

The NCAA formed a task force in February to create new recruiting guidelines. The initial recommendations include a requirement that each school adopt its own written policy on recruiting and accountability for compliance.

Schakowsky said she felt the proposals give too much leeway to the schools, but NCAA representative Wallace Renfro assured her that the final report will be more specific.

"I don't believe the task force is going to finish its report without firmly saying that behaviors that include the use of alcohol, drugs or sex as inducements will not be tolerated," said Renfro, senior adviser to NCAA President Myles Brand.

Schakowsky also said Barnett should have been fired for comments he made about two of nine cases in which women said they were raped by Colorado players or recruits. Barnett was suspended for those comments.

"I just think he should be gone. Gone, gone, gone," **Schakowsky** said. "Once those words came out of his mouth. The fact that he isn't is a very loud message."

The committee also discussed a new set of NCAA reforms aimed at penalizing schools if their athletes perform poorly in the classroom. Schools that fall below a certain performance line could lose scholarships, postseason eligibility and postseason money.

"I believe this is the best set of reforms we've ever put forward," Renfro said.

New York Democrat Edolphus Towns approved.

"You're putting forth an effort," Towns said. "I've not always felt that way."

The hearing was far from contentious. The panel consisted of three pro-reform witnesses - Renfro, Knight Commission chairman Bill Friday and former Congressman Tom McMillen - who mostly agreed with the general tone of the lawmakers' questions. Most of those who spoke lamented the slow progress of collegiate reform over the last decade.

"This is kind of like the movie 'Groundhog Day,'" McMillen said. "We kept getting up with the same stories over and over again."

McMillen offered the most radical solution, reviving discussion of a bill he introduced in 1991 which would have strengthened the NCAA by reversing planks of the 1984 Supreme Court decision that weakened the body. He said too much control has been given to the universities - and their presidents - even as the scandals continue.

"If it can't be policed by the presidents, then we need a federal solution," McMillen said.