

	NEWS FROM		
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**Statement by the Honorable Bobby L. Rush, Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on
Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection
Hearing: “The Bowl Championship Series:
Money and Issues of Fairness at Publicly Funded Universities”**

May 1, 2009

WASHINGTON — “The subcommittee will come to order. Crowning a national champion in college football has long been controversial. Whether it was decided by the Associated Press sportswriters’ poll or by the current Bowl Championship Series, fans and sports-talk radio have always argued over which teams deserved to be ranked Number 1. While, personally, I favor some sort of playoff system to determine a national champion—as does the President of the United States—I understand and appreciate the history and tradition of the bowl system.

“However, criticism of the BCS goes beyond just a mere sporting interest in determining the team that most deserves to be national champion. This is about money, and it’s about money at taxpayer-funded colleges and universities. College football is big business, and the BCS strikes many critics as unfair from a financial perspective.

“There are 11 athletic conferences that make up Division 1 college football. Under the current BCS system, 6 of those conferences—the ACC, SEC, Big East, Big 12, Big 10, and Pac-10—are *guaranteed* \$18 million each to distribute among their schools; while the 5 other, non-automatic

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conferences – the Sun Belt, WAC, MAC, Conference USA, and Mountain West – only receive \$9.5 million *combined*. Notre Dame, an independent school, automatically receives \$1.3 million all by itself.

“How is this fair? How can we justify this system during tough economic times when states are slashing their budgets and cutting spending on education? Let me be clear that we are not examining a trivial matter at today’s hearing. Colleges and universities are funded by taxpayer money, and we have to ask whether or not the big, dominant conferences are engaged in uncompetitive behavior and negotiating contracts at the expense of smaller conferences and their schools. In other words, are the big guys getting together and shutting out the little guys?”

“Such disparity in revenue distribution would arguably be justifiable were the schools from automatic conferences simply better than schools from the non-automatic conferences. But for the past several years, this has clearly not been the case. Just last year, both the ACC and the Big East failed to produce a single team in the Top 10 of the BCS standings, while the Mountain West and the WAC each had a team in the top 10 – Utah and Boise State. Yet, both the ACC and Big East received almost \$19 million each in BCS revenue, while the Mountain West received only \$9.8 million; and the WAC received \$3 million. On its face, this does not seem fair or tied to actual performance on the field.

“Nonetheless, I want to keep an open mind on this matter and hear from our distinguished panelists today. I am eager to hear from Commissioner Swofford and Mr. Fox, and their views on why the way BCS revenue is currently distributed is fair and equitable to taxpayer-funded colleges and universities. I want this to be a deliberative hearing and a robust exchange of ideas. The BCS recently signed a new television contract with ESPN reportedly worth \$125 million a year, starting in 2011. I will be interested to know how the BCS intends to distribute this considerable sum of money to colleges and universities across the country.

“Lastly, I want to thank my good friend, the distinguished Ranking Member and former Chairman of the full Committee, Mr. Barton, for his work on this matter. Mr. Barton has some very strong opinions on this subject, and I appreciate his passion and commitment to exploring this issue. Mr. Barton has introduced legislation on this issue—legislation that I have co-sponsored—and I hope that we can discuss this bill as well.

“I want to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before us today, and I appreciate their travel to the nation’s capital on relatively short notice. I yield back the balance of my time.”