

THE SODERQUIST CENTER

Congress Wastes Time Beating up College Football's BCS

John D. Copeland

J.D., LL.M., Ed.D.

The U.S. faces problems of economic turmoil, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. Despite these serious domestic and international problems, some in Congress waste time and taxpayers' money with hearings and legislation on how the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) decides major college football's national champion.

In 1998, the Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big 10, Pacific 10 and Southeastern conferences developed the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Each year, the composite results of two polls and six computers decide the top 25 major college football teams. The teams ranked 1 and 2 at the end of the regular football season play for the national championship.

The NCAA named the popular Rose, Sugar, Orange and Fiesta bowls as BCS bowls. The championship game rotates among the four bowls. The NCAA also named the six major football conferences that developed the BCS as BCS conferences. The champions of the BCS conferences get automatic bids to a BCS bowl. Teams from non-BCS conferences depend on invitations to play in a BCS bowl. Winning football teams not invited to a BCS bowl play in non-BCS bowls.

Greater prestige and money goes with playing in a BCS bowl rather than in a non-BCS bowl. BCS bowls attract more television coverage and corporate sponsors than non-BCS bowls. Recently, the BCS reached a new four-year deal with ESPN worth \$125 million each year beginning with the 2011 bowl games. Last year, BCS bowl teams received \$18 million each. Teams competing in one of the many non-BCS bowls received from \$750,000 to almost \$3 million each depending on the bowl's popularity.

Controversy erupts nearly every year over BCS bowl invitations. Most complaints come from the fans of winning teams in non-BCS conferences whose teams did not get invitations to a BCS bowl. They argue the BCS favors teams from the six BCS conferences. Sometimes fans of teams from a BCS conference complain if their team is not selected for the national championship game. The controversy makes for lively debate among fans and sports broadcasters.

Now, some members of Congress demand the NCAA scrap the current means of deciding major college football's national champion and go to a playoff system. They justify their interference on major college football being a profitable big business.

Reps. Neal Abercrombie, D-Hawaii, Lyn Westmoreland, R-Ga., and Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, introduced legislation alleging the BCS is an illegal restriction on trade and violates antitrust laws. They contend the six BCS conferences unfairly dominate the BCS bowls and national title game.

The U.S. House of Representatives' Energy and Commerce Committee recently held hearings on the BCS. Committee member Joe Barton, D-TX, introduced legislation preventing the NCAA from naming the winner of its title game college football's national champion under the BCS system.

"They keep trying to tinker with the current system and to me, it's like-And I don't mean this directly-it's like communism," Barton told the committee according to the congressman's Web site. "You can't fix it. I think they should change the name to the BES-Bowl Exhibition Series-or just drop the C and call it the BS system, because it isn't about determining a champion on the field."

BCS coordinator, Joe Swofford defended the BCS contending that many non-BCS bowls would not survive a playoff system because all television and corporate sponsorship money would go to playoff games.

In the U.S. Senate, Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah leads the attack on the BCS. Hatch placed the BCS on the Judiciaries' Antitrust Subcommittee's agenda.

Is congressional concern over a lack of a playoff system for major college football teams ethical while the nation faces so many real problems? Why not let the NCAA's member schools decide whether to abandon the traditional holiday bowl games in favor of a playoff system?

The motives of the senators and representatives demanding a playoff system are suspect. They all represent states home to football teams left out of the BCS title game in recent years. Undefeated teams from Utah and Hawaii failed to get invitations to the national title game, as did excellent University of Texas and University of Georgia teams. None of those teams finished the regular season ranked number 1 or 2.

It is unethical for members of Congress to introduce punitive legislation against the BCS because football fans in their states became upset when their teams did not get into the national championship game or a BCS bowl.

If only Congress would show the same bipartisan spirit and energy in solving the nation's real problems.