

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2021

Mr. Mark Emmert
President
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
700 W Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46026

Dear Mr. Emmert:

We are dismayed that the NCAA has once again dropped the ball and failed to provide women athletes with the equal access to COVID-19 screening, workout equipment, and accommodations as their male counterparts during this month's basketball tournaments.

Earlier this month, University of Oregon's Sedona Prince sparked a reckoning about the disparities in the NCAA's treatment of its men's and women's basketball tournaments when she posted a video comparing the generously stocked men's weight room to the small rack of weights provided to women.¹ Other athletes and faculty spoke up after Sedona's post, drawing attention to the paltry accommodations, meals, and amenities provided to women compared to men.²

Above all else, it is the NCAA's decision to provide only the men's tournament with the "gold standard" of COVID-19 tests that defies explanation and common sense.³ According to the coach of the eleven-time national champion UConn Huskies women's basketball team, while men have been using the more accurate PCR testing method, women have instead received the cheaper antigen tests, which are less sensitive and therefore can be less accurate.⁴ It is indefensible that the NCAA would not set the same standards for both tournaments. We ask that you take immediate action to rectify this inequity.

¹ Tweet from Sedona Prince. https://twitter.com/sedonaprince_/status/1372736231562342402

² Tweet from AJ McCord. https://twitter.com/AJ_McCord/status/1372759106121912320

Tweet from AJ McCord. https://twitter.com/AJ_McCord/status/1373849223347765249

³ "Different types of COVID-19 tests explained," UC Davis Health, November 12, 2020, <https://health.ucdavis.edu/health-news/newsroom/different-types-of-covid-19-tests-explained/2020/1/>.

⁴ Alexa Philippou, "UConn coaches, players call out NCAA over differences between men's, women's tournament bubbles." Hartford Courant, March 19, 2021, <https://www.courant.com/sports/uconn-womens-basketball/hc-sp-uconn-women-tournament-20210320-20210320-ufqaqzdwgre3zpq74p5o4o5b4i-story.html>.

Incredibly, the NCAA, while running a tournament that rakes in nearly a \$1 billion in revenue, claimed not to be able to find the room and money to afford its women stars with a decent gym and basic equal treatment.⁵ We call foul.

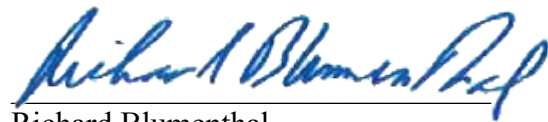
The NCAA holds up its commitments to equality in press releases and at oversight hearings, but the institution unsurprisingly failed its women athletes yet again. In an all-too-familiar pattern, the NCAA did not seem to notice these vast disparities or seek to address them – until the issue became a public relations problem.

The NCAA women’s basketball tournament showcases some of our country’s most talented college athletes. We should know; the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers and the UConn Huskies women’s basketball team have won an astonishing nineteen national championships between them. The players on these teams are the pride of our states who inspire on the court and off. And yet, the women’s tournament and its outstanding athletes continue to be an afterthought to the Association.

We may not agree on which state is the basketball capital of the world, but on this we agree: you must end this inexcusable pattern of inequities and neglect, and be transparent with these stellar women athletes about the steps you will take to ensure they have the same opportunities and support as their male counterparts.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We request a response confirming that you have taken all steps to guarantee full and equal health protections, accommodations, and support to the NCAA’s Women’s’ Basketball Tournament no later than April 8, 2021.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senate

⁵ Tim Fitzsimons, “Women at NCAA tournament allege weight room disparities,” NBC News, March 19, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/sports/women-ncaa-tournament-allege-weight-room-disparities-n1261600>.
Jabari Young, “With \$1 billion on the line, March Madness is ready for its comeback,” CNBC, March 16, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/16/with-1-billion-on-the-line-march-madness-is-ready-for-its-comeback.html>.