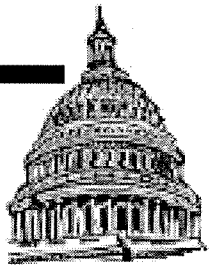
JIM BUNNING
U.S. Senator for Kentucky



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STATEMENT BY U.S. SENATOR JIM BUNNING
HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM HEARING ON STEROIDS AND MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL
MARCH 17, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to come here today and testify on this very important issue.

As a member of the Hall of Fame, as someone who helped found the Players Association, and as a lifelong fan, protecting the integrity of our national pastime is a matter that is near and dear to my heart.

Since the beginning of this scandal, I've said that baseball should get the chance to clean up its own mess and government should stay out of the way.

With the new steroid testing policy, it looks like baseball has taken the first baby steps toward restoring honesty to the game. But if they backslide or don't follow through, then the owners and players need to know that we can and will act.

Mr. Chairman, thank goodness that I don't have any personal experience with steroids. They weren't around during my 17 years in the Major Leagues.

But when players broke the rules or cheated ---- for sharpening spikes or corking a bat, or something worse ---- they were suspended.

Since 1991 it has been illegal under federal law to possess or sell anabolic steroids without a prescription.

Many steroidal dietary supplements, like Andro, were regulated as controlled substances by legislation that Congress passed last year.

These substances have no place in baseball. And players who use them illegally are cheaters.

Like I said before, I think the new policy that suspends players for steroid use is a baby step forward.

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For more information, contact Mike Reynard at (202) 224-1156 (office) or (202) 302-3716 (cell)
or email mike_reynard@bunning.senate.gov

Personally, I think the penalties are pretty puny. I'd like to see much stronger ones ---- one month suspension for a first offense, a year for the second and then three strikes and you're out.

Football has stronger penalties and everyone agrees its program has worked.

Players who break the law and cheat should be severely punished and their records and stats from when they used steroids should be wiped out.

If baseball fails to fix this scandal, there are a lot of things we can do to get their attention ---- by amending the labor laws, repealing the outdated antitrust exemption that baseball alone enjoys, and shining the spotlight of public scrutiny.

The last thing I want is for the national pastime to be the subject of a witch hunt. All of the players should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

But we can't let anything get swept under the rug either. It's important we hear from the players themselves about the steroids in the game.

We need to hear the truth. And I think hearings like the one your committee is holding today can be helpful in bringing the truth forward.

The players and Major League Baseball must be held accountable for the integrity of the game. After all, it's not their game. It's ours. They're just enjoying the privilege of playing it for a short time.

What I think a many of today's players don't understand is that many others came before them, and even more will come after.

And all of us have an obligation to protect the integrity of the greatest game ever invented.

Now the game of baseball has been tarnished because some players didn't follow the rules and thought they were bigger than the game.

It's disturbing to see that trend continuing today. Baseball has to follow the rules just like everyone else.

If a player thinks they are above the law of the land and can defy a Congressional subpoena, they are sadly mistaken.

They are not bigger than the game and they are not bigger than the law.

The same goes for the owners. For over a decade, they turned their heads when it came to steroids. They helped put the game at risk.

Not only did they turn a blind eye, they built smaller parks making it easier to hit home runs. The balls started flying farther. We have to ask why all of these things happened?

Some in the press have talked about this hearing like it's a lark. It isn't. Congress is dead serious.

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We have every right to be concerned that the national pastime and all that it represents has been threatened by the selfish actions of a few.

Baseball is part of our culture, our history. And it's a multi-billion dollar business that affects our economy and most of our largest communities.

There's no doubt that Congress has a direct and important interest in what happens in baseball.

Finally, players can't forget that like it or not they are role models. By using steroids, they've sent the wrong message to kids and the public.

A 2003 CDC survey estimated that half a million high school kids had tried steroids.

40 percent of 12th graders in a recent University of Michigan study said that steroids were "easy" to get.

So it's important that the American public understand just how harmful steroids can be to someone's health.

Side-effects of steroid use include things like fatal liver cysts, liver cancer, blood clotting, hypertension, and can even lead to heart attack or stroke.

Baseball has helped to open a pandora's box. Now it has a chance to fix that damage and educate the public on the terrible health affects of steroids.

Baseball needs to know that we are watching. And even more importantly, the fans are watching.

Mr. Chairman, maybe I'm old fashioned. I remember when players didn't get better as they got older. We all got worse. When I played with Hank Aaron and Willie Mays and Ted Williams, they didn't put on forty pounds of bulk in their careers, and they didn't hit more homers in their late thirties than they did in their late twenties.

What's happening now in baseball isn't natural and it isn't right. Baseball has to get its act together or else.

So let's see how they do. For now I will follow the proverb that President Reagan always quoted – "trust but verify."

I'm willing to trust baseball, but players and owners have a special responsibility to protect the game. And they owe it to all of us to prove that they are fixing this terrible problem. If not we will have to do it for them.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to speak before your committee today.

I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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