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opinion

Win one for the griper

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Congress is at it again, battling unfairness wherever it pops up. This time, it's taking on college athletics, a world in which a conniving cartel spins backroom deals and then foists injustice on vulnerable football fans.

Who but politicians could stand up to these bullies? No worries, though. The collegiate football business, we are told, has interstate commerce implications, so the Constitution allows busybodies to regulate it.

Leading the charge is Congressman Joe Barton, a Republican — the party that doggedly refuses to stick its nose into other people's business unless that business leads to gruesome things like skewed playoff systems. Barton has decided that Congress should try to eliminate the Bowl Championship Series.

"It's time," Barton explained on the day the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee passed the bill with an easy bipartisan vote, "for the backroom bullies of the BCS to replace the current system with a playoff that's fair and open

to all teams . . . Let's determine the college football champion on the field of play, four downs at a time."

We've not seen such nauseating sports-related preening from Congress since the Subcommittee on Assaulting Taxpayers' Intelligence and Home Runs, or some such thing, berated Major League sluggers for their Lou Ferrigno-like physiques.

Yet, Barton is not alone in his concern. President Barack Obama and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, are just two of the other high-profile politicians who have spoken out against the BCS system.

Barton's bill would, among other things, prevent the Bowl Championship Series from marketing a postseason game as a "national championship" unless it is the result of a fair playoff system open to everyone.

Why stop there? Why, for instance, is Major League Baseball allowed to manipulate us with this "World" Series claptrap for the last century when it refuses to open the competition to Venerables y Brujos de Guayama or even the Savannah Sand Gnats? Isn't that unfair?

The Oakland Raiders still exist. Is that fair? Phoenix has a professional hockey team but Vermont has nada. Fair? Sports can't always be fair. It can't be open to everyone. But it should be entertaining.

Barton (not entertaining) explained that this year's testimony from college bigwigs had been

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"more cogent than four years ago and it is much more open about why the bowl system exists — and it is money."

Really? *Money*, you say? College football generates millions of dollars and operates through interstate commerce. Isn't that why Barton claimed to have a government interest in the BCS in the first place?

Of course it's about money. Many bowls will feature strong teams that the public has a desire to watch. Now, I don't mean to offend any sports fans, but there are schools that create anticipation and drive ratings across the country. And then there are teams from Utah.

"It's like communism; you can't fix it," Barton went on after the testimony. As a person who frequently and recklessly refers to his political opponents as Marxists, I would remind the congressman that in communist nations sports were under the management of politicians.

Come to think of it, communists are always whining about unfairness. They are always nattering about the ills of money. Communists tend to do a lot of their best work on "committees," as well.

Should college football bowl matchups hinge on an intricate computer program? Should Alabama and Texas be playing in the championship game? Should TCU or Boise State be ignored?

I have no clue. What I do know is that schools

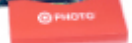
and fans, not some commie committee in Washington, should be the ones making those sort of decisions.

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