

Hall of Famers Back Tougher Drug Testing

By HOWARD FENDRICH, AP Sports Writer – September 28, 2005

Career home run leader Hank Aaron and four other baseball Hall of Famers told Congress on Wednesday they support commissioner Bud Selig's proposals to toughen the sport's drug-testing policy.

Invited by Selig to appear at a Senate Commerce Committee hearing on steroids in sports, former star players Aaron, Ryne Sandberg, Phil Niekro, Robin Roberts and Lou Brock were not on the witness list. But Sen. John McCain (news, bio, voting record), R-Ariz., who ran the hearing, asked them to speak before the testimony of Selig and the commissioners and union leaders of four major professional sports leagues.

"I want to applaud the commissioner, and I also just want to make sure that whatever we do, we make sure that we clean up baseball," said Aaron, whose record of 755 homers is being approached by San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds.

Sandberg, who addressed steroids during his Hall of Fame induction speech in July, told the Senators: "We here today owe America's pastime a strict policy."

Selig, baseball union head Donald Fehr and officials from the National Football League, National Basketball Association and National Hockey League were called to discuss two pieces of Senate legislation that would standardize drug policies across sports. Three similar bills have been introduced in the House.

"There are some who will say Congress has no business in this issue," McCain said. "But ... professional sports have not acted, and we have an obligation to our young people."

He sponsored the Clean Sports Act, a companion to the House bill introduced by Government Reform Chairman Tom Davis, R-Va. Sen. Jim Bunning (news, bio, voting record), a Kentucky Republican and former pitcher elected to baseball's Hall of Fame in 1996, sponsored the Professional Sports and Integrity Act.

While other league's leaders were also testifying, it appeared that, as has been the case since Davis' panel grilled Mark McGwire, Rafael Palmeiro, Selig and others about steroids on March 17, the focus was on baseball. Palmeiro, who emphatically told Congress that day he had never used steroids, was suspended Aug. 1 after failing a drug test.

Baseball, Bunning said, "seems to be the biggest problem."

In April, Selig called for a 50-game suspension after an initial positive test, a 100-game ban for second-time offenders and a lifetime ban for a third violation. Currently, a first offense carries a 10-day ban.

This week, Fehr offered to accept a 20-game penalty for first-time steroid offenders.



"We believe that we've made a lot of strides ... and we are prepared to do a lot more," Fehr testified Wednesday.

Selig acknowledged that "baseball presently has a problem," adding, "It is my goal ... to eradicate the use of performance-enhancing substances from the game and I will not leave one stone unturned until this happens."

Both Senate bills call for a two-year suspension the first time an athlete fails a drug test and a lifetime ban after a second failed test. The four leagues whose officials appeared Wednesday have less strict penalties, though all have toughened or proposed toughening their programs in recent months — in some cases, right before or after congressional hearings on the subject.

"For whatever reason, you just can't get it done, and you can't get your act together," Bunning said. "I and millions of fans think that's pathetic."

He has said he expects legislation to reach the floor of Congress before the end of the year, and on Wednesday, Bunning spoke of being, "on the brink of possibly passing legislation."

—

The bills are S. 1114 (Clean Sports Act) and S. 1334 (Professional Sports Integrity and Accountability Act).