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Congress, Major League Baseball Spar Over Steroids

By Jim Stevenson

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Some of Major League Baseball's top players and officials have appeared at a U.S. Congressional hearing on the use of illegal performance-enhancing steroids. Members of Congress sharply criticized baseball's latest efforts to test and punish players who use the drugs.

Former star player Jose Canseco acknowledged in a recent book that he took steroids. His accusations that other players also used steroids sparked debate over the legitimacy of some baseball records.

Amid the growing allegations and a recent global drug scandal involving some of baseball's biggest names, the sport has for the first time started testing for steroids this year.

But in Washington Thursday, Henry Waxman, the ranking Democrat of the House of Representatives' Government Reform Committee, said baseball's new anti-steroid policy is too weak.

"For 30 years, Major League Baseball has told us to trust them. But the league has not honored that trust," Congressman Waxman said. "And it has not acted to protect the integrity of baseball or send the right message to millions of teenagers who idolize ballplayers."

Baseball commissioner Bud Selig defended the initial steps the sport has made to combat the problem.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig listens to congressional testimony, Thursday

"Do I think steroid use is very serious? Congressmen, I think it is very serious," he said. "And as we test, we will be able to discipline players or people that violate that under the terms of our collective bargaining agreement. I think we have dealt with the issue as aggressively as we could. But there is clearly work to be done. I do not deny that. But I can assure you we are not taking it lightly."

Baseball enjoys a special exemption and tax status in the United States because the sport, known as "America's Pastime," has a significant place in American cultural history. Congress has considered withdrawing baseball's special status if it does not institute heavier anti-doping policies.



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