

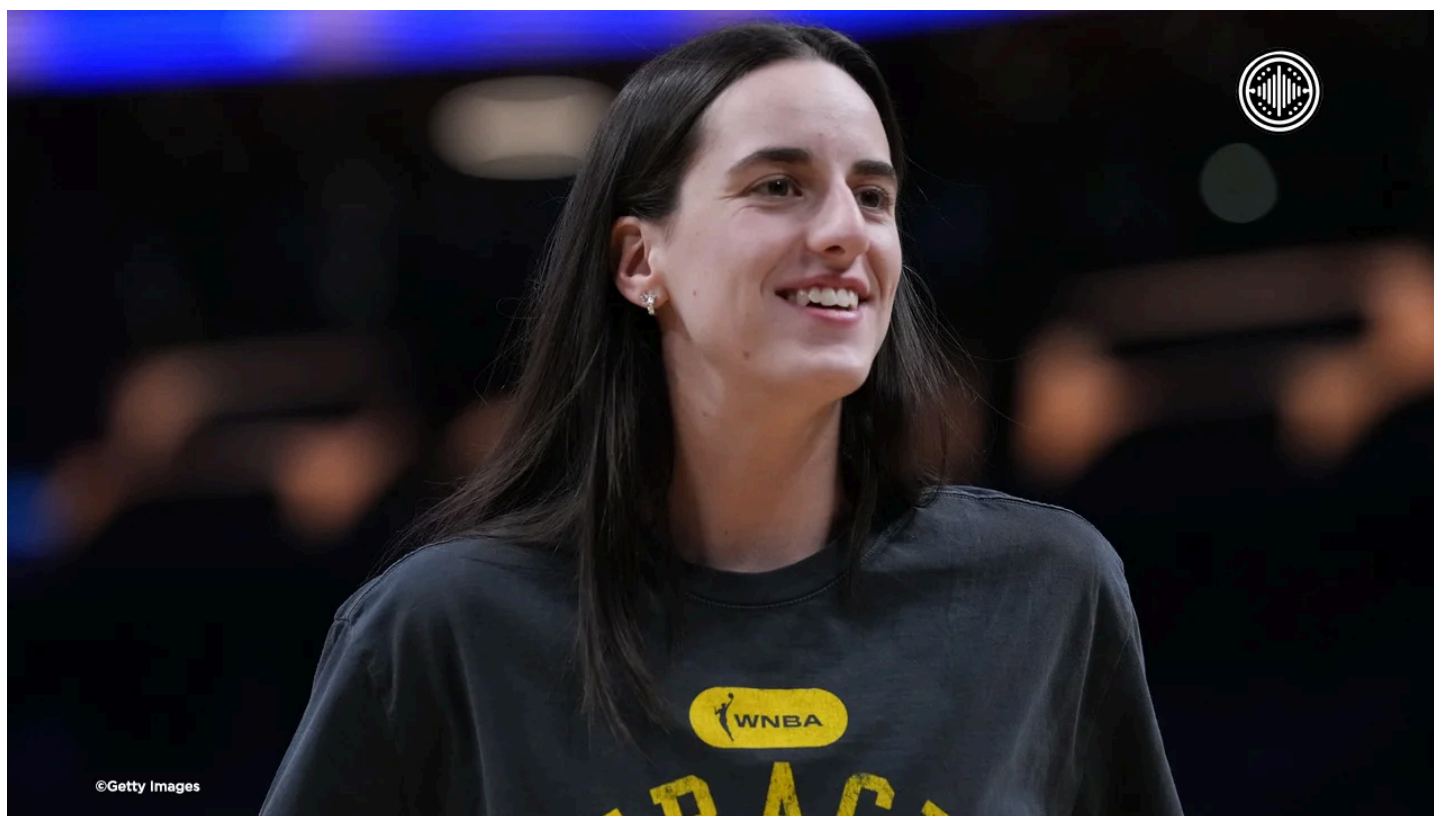
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Calls Grow for Scrutiny Over WNBA Treatment of Caitlin Clark Amid Rising Tensions

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Stephen A. Smith, veteran ESPN commentator and host of *First Take*, has lent credibility to calls for a federal inquiry into the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) over its treatment of Indiana Fever rookie Caitlin Clark. His remarks come in response to a recent *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece written by Sean McLean, a former official in the Trump administration and Republican congressional offices, who argues that Clark may be experiencing a hostile work environment in the league.

In the op-ed, McLean compares Clark to NBA legend Michael Jordan, asserting that the former University of Iowa star is not being adequately protected or supported by the WNBA despite her high-profile impact on the league. He urges federal agencies—including the U.S. Department of Labor and Congress—to investigate whether the league has allowed a culture that unfairly targets Clark. His argument suggests that the lack of league response to Clark's physical treatment on the court may warrant legal and political scrutiny.

One of the more contentious elements of McLean's piece involves a quote from Las Vegas Aces forward A'ja Wilson. In an interview with the *Associated Press* last year, Wilson commented on Clark's popularity, saying, "I think a lot of people may say it's not about Black and white, but to me it is... it boils my blood when people say it's not about race, because it is." McLean referenced this quote to imply racial motives behind Clark's treatment, a characterization that drew backlash from analysts and fans alike, who accused him of taking Wilson's comments out of context.

Despite the divided public reaction to the op-ed, Smith acknowledged on his *Stephen A. Smith Show* podcast that the premise could have enough weight to warrant further discussion, if not formal inquiry. "I'm not here saying the case will be won by the government if it gets to that point," Smith said. "I'm saying they have a case, they have an argument."

Smith also raised the possibility that former President Donald Trump could amplify the issue to rally his political base. He suggested that Clark's situation could become a significant flashpoint, especially if it continues to draw national attention. "Do we doubt that... if finds this to be an issue that is politically expedient to him, that he won't use this to feed his base?" Smith asked. "You don't think Caitlin Clark could become an issue of national, potentially international, and definitely federal proportions?"

Caitlin Clark, who has become one of the WNBA's most talked-about players since entering the league earlier this year, is currently sidelined with a groin injury that was aggravated during a July 15 game. Her return date remains uncertain.

While opinions remain split on whether Clark is being unfairly targeted or whether this controversy is politically motivated, Smith's remarks have added a new layer of legitimacy to concerns voiced by some on the political right. If the claims gain further traction, the matter could draw official interest and potentially become part of broader cultural and political conversations heading into the 2024 election cycle.