



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

118 College Drive #5001 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406
P: 601.266.5001 | F: 601.266.5756 | usm.edu

June 4, 2026

The Honorable Roger Wicker
United States Senate
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wicker:

As President of The University of Southern Mississippi, and on behalf of our faculty, staff, students and loyal alumni, I write to express my strong support for the Protect College Sports Act of 2026 and its comprehensive effort to reform college athletics. Is the Act perfect? No, it is not, but it is broad enough for us to work within. It is our best chance to begin to rein in the runaway direction college athletics has taken in this era of NIL and unlimited transfers of student-athletes. My fear is the very real probability that if Congress is unable to act now that we will be in an immeasurably worse position a year from now. I do not believe that even our SEC in-state universities can keep up with the spending arms race as its trajectory continues to skyrocket. I can assure you, that even as a member of a non-autonomous sports conference, Southern Miss cannot keep pace with the current rate of spending. What is at stake is losing a traditional part of our student experience that is central to our identity and ability to recruit students. Importantly, the current direction will lead to diminished opportunities for women student-athletes and participants in Olympic and non-revenue sports. Indeed, the Presidents of all 14 members of our Sun Belt Conference have endorsed this proposed legislation. Our conference is represented by schools similar to Southern Miss in seven contiguous southern states.

The Protect College Sports Act addresses several critical areas for the sustainability of college athletics.

- **Preempting State NIL Laws:** The Act would preempt the patchwork of state NIL laws, which is crucial for preventing competitive disadvantages between institutions.
- **Transfer Stability:** We support the Act's efforts to establish a national transfer framework that balances student-athlete opportunity with roster stability and competitive equity.
- **Agent Regulations:** We support the establishment of agent regulations to protect our student-athletes.
- **NCAA Rule-Making Authority:** We welcome the Act's confirmation of the NCAA's authority to set rules regarding eligibility, transfers, agents, and recruiting, including tampering.

The United States remains the only country in the world where a young adult can attain a world class education and compete at the highest level in athletics. At Southern Miss, we stand ready to work with you in any way we can to ensure that the Protect College Sports Act of 2026 is passed as it reflects our academic mission and the needs of student-athletes and sustains the long-term vitality of college athletics.

Thank you for all you do for Southern Miss and the great State of Mississippi. Let me know how I can help.

Sincerely,

Joseph S. Paul, Ph.D.
President