

TEXAS SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE
Future of College Sports in Texas
Monday, August 2, 2021

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Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics
Baylor University

Madame Chair and members of the Committee,

I am Mack Rhoades, Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics for Baylor University. I want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to come and speak with you today. While I do not like the circumstances that brought me here, I love that I can be here to speak on behalf of people I deeply care about. I am here today on behalf of the student-athletes at Baylor University, our university, the extended Baylor Family, and the Waco and Central Texas community.

I use the term Baylor Family very intentionally. Baylor University truly is a family – from our incoming freshmen to our oldest alumni, from the classroom to the boardroom, from the administrative staff to the President, we are a family. Unlike any place I've ever been, people at Baylor want to be at Baylor. This speaks volumes about our people, our culture, and our vibrant Christian mission. But family doesn't stop with formal association. The great people of Waco and Central Texas are part of the Baylor Family. They serve and support us as Baylor serves and supports them. They are our doctors, pastors, mechanics, teachers, fans, and friends. It is as good a community as you could ever want to live. The Baylor Family is big. And this current uncertainty around college athletics in the state of Texas affects all of us.

Maybe mistakenly, I considered the Big 12 Conference something of a family, too. We compete hard against each other in conference play, but nationally we always backed our Big 12 brethren. Since arriving at Baylor in 2016, I have cheered hard for Oklahoma in the College Football Playoff and for Kansas and Texas Tech in the Final Four. If the University of Texas had ever made either of those, I would have cheered hard for them as well. We were so proud, as the Baylor Bears, to bring the Big 12 a national championship in men's basketball this past spring. Along with our three national titles in women's basketball, the rafters of our new basketball pavilion in Waco promise to be crowded. But much as I can, I did not come today to rattle off a long list of our athletic accomplishments. As the Baylor Family, we know our achievements and are secure in them.

I come here today with two modest requests. I do not believe there is a political solution to this situation, but I do believe our political leaders can be part of the solution as we move forward. Together. This is not a partisan issue; it is a people issue.

My first request is very simply that each of you truly understand the ramifications of this move of Texas from the Big 12 to the Southeastern Conference. There will be widespread effects. The potential adverse economic impact of this transition in Waco, Lubbock, and Fort Worth is very real, which we look forward to sharing with you. To the extent that there is economic upside, much of it will be felt outside of the state of Texas in neighboring places such as Fayetteville, Arkansas; Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and distant ones such as Columbia, South Carolina. In other words, the ancillary economic benefits of this move are being transferred from communities within Texas to communities outside of Texas – all initiated behind closed doors by our state’s flagship university and unknowingly subsidized by our taxpayers.

My second ask is that each of you commit time, resources, and effort to preserving and strengthening the Big 12. Texas is our nation’s greatest state. We deserve to have a Power 5 college athletic conference headquartered here. The Big 12 calls Texas home, with the conference office based in Irving. Texas proudly leads the nation currently with five Power 5 schools in the state. It should stay that way, if not increase. The Big 12 hosts the Big 12 Football Championship annually in Arlington at AT&T Stadium and has the DFW Metroplex in regular rotation to host the NCAA Final Four – both huge economic drivers and important points of pride for our state. Each of you can have a role to play in preserving and strengthening the state’s role in intercollegiate athletics moving forward.

I am truly humbled that you have asked me here today, and I want to maintain that spirit of humility. Our industry and our campus are certainly not perfect. There are those who might say that some negative impact might be deserved because of the past mistakes of our industry or our university. However, our 500-plus student-athletes and our community do not deserve this. Not one bit. The ones who will feel the impact most are the ones who have no role in any of this. These are exactly the type of people who most vow to fight for. So let’s fight together – as Texans and for the greater good of our state.

Many of my colleagues around the country – and believe me, I’ve spoken to quite a few over the past two weeks – have commented that this current situation came about because the University of Texas thinks so much of themselves. I disagree. I think this has come about because Texas thinks too little of themselves. The high-profile success of a neighboring conference has created in them an unwarranted insecurity that has metastasized. Unfortunately, so many of us are left in the fallout.

For two centuries, the ethos of our great state has been strength and independence. And that is the spirit with which we are resolved to move forward. Because if we lose that, we lose a lot more than football.

Thank you, and God bless.