

Clemson hosts Gov. McMaster's ceremonial signing of NIL bill

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Gov. Henry McMaster on June 14 held a ceremonial signing for S. 685, which had already been officially signed into law May 6. Joshua Needelman/The Post and Courier.

CLEMSON — From the fourth floor of Clemson's \$12 million West End Zone building, with Frank Howard Field at his back, Gov. Henry McMaster on June 14 held a ceremonial signing for a bill meant to help level the playing field in college athletics.

McMaster officially signed S.685, the bill allowing South Carolina athletes to profit off their name, image and likeness, into law May 6, but about six weeks later he came to Clemson to "sign" the bill in front of cameras.

"This is a part of education, and also a part of economics," McMaster said. "This new law is an exercise in free enterprise that allows those who have attracted attention and achieved a certain status, in athletics particularly, to be recognized

for that without interfering with their academic performance. It's something whose time has come."

When asked why Clemson was the school chosen for the occasion, McMaster grinned and noted that, "we couldn't do it at all of them." But the significance of the location was not lost on those in attendance.

Players and advocates have long pushed for NIL compensation, but after other states adopted their own NIL laws, South Carolina lawmakers realized the absence of similar legislation put their schools at a competitive disadvantage for recruiting. And no program is more important to the state's national profile than the Clemson football team, winners of two of the past five national championships.

Seventeen other states have passed similar legislation, including Florida, which has a law set to go into effect July 1.

The belief among some is that Congress and the NCAA will pass national NIL legislation before then, but just in case, the Palmetto State — and its most important sports program — will have the infrastructure in place to allow athletes to monetize their brands starting July 1, 2022.

"This is a joyous day in intercollegiate athletics," Clemson athletic director Dan Radakovich said.

The bill passed in the S.C. House by a 103-15 margin but by just one vote in the Senate. S.C. Rep Davey Hiott on June 14 conceded he was skeptical of the bill at first, but his tune shifted after he realized the impact NIL legislation could have on recruiting — and he considered the humans at the center of the debate.

From a lectern beside McMaster, Hiott gestured to the Tigers football players in attendance: running back Darien Rencher, defensive end K.J. Henry, offensive linemen Matt Bockhorst and Mac Cranford, and wide receiver Will Brown.

“We’re glad you’re here,” Hiott said. “And when you leave here, we want to you to represent the state of South Carolina and be proud to be from South Carolina.”

Chance Miller, South Carolina’s senior deputy athletics director, was also in attendance and spoke briefly from the lectern. But it was clear June 14 was about Clemson.

As McMaster “signed” the bill, flanked on either side by Radakovich and Miller, the five Tigers players in attendance stood just behind the governor. Rencher afterward extended his hand and offered McMaster an invitation: “Come back in the fall.”

Rencher, a sixth-year player, could be in line to benefit greatly if national NIL legislation is enacted before the start of his final season. The reserve running back is not a household name, like former quarterback Trevor Lawrence, but in five years at Clemson he’s built a reputation as a hard-worker and locker room leader. He won the 2020 Disney Spirit Award, presented annually to the sport’s more inspirational figure.

Rencher, who has 40,500 followers on Instagram, said he already has a plan in place.

“If this thing gets passed, y’all are going to see me work all the tricks and trades,” Rencher said. “I would definitely work the smile.”