

By: Senator(s) Johnson, Blackmon, Frazier

To: Rules

## SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 84

1 A RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING LEGENDARY USM LADY  
2 EAGLES WOMEN'S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH JOYE LEE-MCNELIS UPON THE  
3 OCCASION HER RETIREMENT AND INDUCTION INTO THE LEGENDS CLUB IN  
4 HONOR OF HER OUTSTANDING 45-YEAR CAREER.

5 WHEREAS, we join the students, basketball alumni and fellow  
6 coaches of legendary USM Lady Eagles Women's Basketball Head Coach  
7 Joye Lee-McNelis who has announced that she will retire as the  
8 program's head coach at the end of the 2024-2025 season; and

9 WHEREAS, the leader of the Lady Eagles for the last 21  
10 seasons, McNelis, 62, is an institution in the game of women's  
11 basketball. She has spent the last 34 seasons as a Division I  
12 Head Coach at Memphis (1991-2004) and Southern Miss  
13 (2004-present). A 1997 inductee into the Southern Miss M-Club  
14 Hall of Fame, 2024 Pat Summitt Most Courageous Award winner and  
15 most recent inductee into the Southern Miss Legends Club, McNelis  
16 is a true legend in Hattiesburg and in her sport; and

17 WHEREAS, a native of Leetown, Mississippi, McNelis first  
18 arrived in Hattiesburg 45 years ago as a college freshman from  
19 Hancock North Central High School. As a freshman, she became an



20 integral part of the Lady Eagles program as an efficient shooter,  
21 helping the 1980-1981 squad to Southern Miss' first-ever  
22 postseason tournament appearance. A four-year letterwinner for  
23 Coach Kay James, McNelis finished her career with the second-most  
24 points in school history; and

25 WHEREAS, after two seasons at Texas State, McNelis returned  
26 to Hattiesburg to join the Lady Eagles staff for the 1986-1987  
27 season. As an Assistant Coach for Coach James, McNelis began a  
28 five-season career as one of the nation's most-renowned students  
29 of the game. As the program's primary recruiter, McNelis  
30 assembled some of the best classes in the country in Hattiesburg.  
31 Multiple classes were ranked in the top 10 nationally and included  
32 some of the greatest Lady Eagles in program history, including  
33 Tanya Bullock, Alexis Hall and Janice Felder — the most decorated  
34 player in program history; and

35 WHEREAS, after helping Southern Miss to three NCAA  
36 Tournaments and a 103-47 overall record in her five seasons,  
37 McNelis began her next chapter. On April 11, 1991, at just 28  
38 years old, she accepted the head coaching position at Memphis  
39 State. Following the Tigers first and only Head Coach of the  
40 modern era and all-time wins leader Mary Lou Johns, McNelis' task  
41 of bringing the Lady Tigers back to national prominence was not  
42 easy. However, for the next 13 seasons McNelis did just that,  
43 amassing 229 wins and four berths in the NCAA Tournament; and



WHEREAS, on May 14, 2004, McNelis came home to Hattiesburg and accepted the job as the Head Coach of her Southern Miss Lady Eagles. Her homecoming was nearly 20 years in the making as she took over as the fourth Head Coach in program history; and

WHEREAS, taking the reins immediately, McNelis established the "Wings" Booster Club to further support the Lady Eagles program. While her turnaround was slow, the Lady Eagles made strides in each of her first three seasons. In 2007-2008, her fourth season back in Hattiesburg, saw Southern Miss win 21 games. Her next group in 2008-2009 posted Southern Miss' first back-to-back 20-win seasons since 1996. Future Lady Eagles Hall of Famer Pauline Love dominated Conference USA en route to three First Team All-C-USA selections; and

WHEREAS, McNelis continued her romp through Conference USA and was named the league's 2014 Coach of the Year after a second-place finish and record-setting 27-7 campaign in 2013-2014. From 2013-2015, Southern Miss won 52 games and won 25-plus games in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 1990; and

WHEREAS, in helping Southern Miss make the transition to the Sun Belt Conference in 2022-2023, McNelis led her Lady Eagles to the league's regular season title and a semifinal finish in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. The title was the program's first since 1994 and McNelis' first since 1998; and

WHEREAS, as time marched on, McNelis continued to rack up wins and won her 500th career game in the 2021-2022 season-opener



69 over William Carey. In 2022-2023, she won her 300th game leading  
70 Southern Miss and her 550th game the next season. She continued  
71 to break through barriers, coaching her 1,000th career game last  
72 season against Murray State in the WNIT; and

73 WHEREAS, after leading the Lady Eagles to a Super 16 finish  
74 in the 2024 Postseason WNIT, McNelis earned the Pat Summitt Most  
75 Courageous Award from the United State Basketball Writers  
76 Association. Earlier this season on January 18, 2025, McNelis  
77 became the latest inductee into the Southern Miss Legends Club,  
78 joining her Head Coach Kay James and former All-American Janice  
79 Felder in the rafters of Reed Green Coliseum; and

80 WHEREAS, in 34 seasons as a Division I Head Coach, McNelis  
81 has made 14 postseason appearances, won two Coach of the Year  
82 titles, had 45 players named to All-Conference lists, two players  
83 named Player of the Year, and sent 13 former players to the  
84 professional ranks. She retires as one of 61 coaches in the  
85 history of women's basketball to win over 550 games; and

86 WHEREAS, McNelis was honored at Reed Green Coliseum at  
87 halftime of the men's basketball game against Troy; and

88 WHEREAS, "I want to thank Joye and her family for their  
89 dedication to Southern Miss and to Lady Eagles basketball over the  
90 past 21 years. Coach McNelis has had a significant impact as a  
91 leader in our university community and throughout college  
92 basketball. Wins and losses have been just a piece of her legacy.  
93 I appreciate her attention to detail in leading her



94 student-athletes and coaches in their daily lives and hope that  
95 she will continue to be a light around Southern Miss. I wish her  
96 well on the next chapter of her journey and thank her for the  
97 immense impact she had leading our program," said Jeremy McClain,  
98 Director of Athletics; and

99 WHEREAS, it is with great pride and respect that we  
100 acknowledge the athletic and administrative career of a  
101 Mississippi coach who has brought honor to her university and to  
102 the State of Mississippi:

103 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF  
104 MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby commend and congratulate legendary  
105 USM Women's Basketball Head Coach Joye Lee-McNelis upon the  
106 occasion her retirement and induction into the Legends Club in  
107 honor of her outstanding 45-year career, and extend to Coach Joye  
108 Lee-McNelis our best wishes for future success.

109 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to  
110 Coach Joye Lee-McNelis, forwarded to USM President Dr. Joseph S.  
111 Paul and the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher  
112 Learning, and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

