

# Wicker, Merkley Launch Bipartisan Effort to Overtake New Limits on Student Loans for Nurses

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., introduced a new bill in response to a decision by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that fails to classify post-baccalaureate nursing degrees as “professional degrees,” imposing stricter limits on federal student loans for nurses.

The bipartisan Nursing is a Professional Degree Act provides a simple fix and guarantees nursing students pursuing post-baccalaureate nursing programs can

access affordable student loans. Specifically, this bill classifies post-baccalaureate nursing degrees as “professional degrees,” which would entitle nurses taking out federal student loans to a cap of \$50,000 annually and \$200,000 in the aggregate. The most recent rule from ED subjects nurses pursuing post-baccalaureate degrees to federal loan caps of \$20,500 annually and \$100,000 in the aggregate, which pushes them toward higher-interest private loans to complete their education.

“It is imperative that Congress address the nursing shortage across the United States. This legislation would make nursing a more achievable profession by expanding the loan limits for nursing students. Classifying post-baccalaureate nursing degrees as professional degrees would give these students more financial freedom after graduation,” said Senator Wicker.

“Nurses save lives, one bedside at a time. We should be doing everything we can to make it easier to recruit the next generation of these heroes, not make it harder,” said Senator Merkley. “Republicans and Democrats alike have sounded the alarm over changes that make student loans

for nurses more expensive, which threaten the future of the nursing workforce. Our simple and straightforward bill corrects this wrong, ensuring nursing students can continue to access the support they need to achieve their dreams and save lives.”

As leaders of the Senate Nursing Caucus, Senators Wicker and Merkley have led bipartisan efforts to oppose changes to federal student loans for nurses, support the more than 5 million registered nurses nationwide, and address the challenges facing the nursing workforce. Senators Wicker and Merkley’s Nursing is a Professional Degree Act is supported by 250 organizations, the full list of supporting organizations can be found by clicking here.

“On behalf of America’s nurse educators and nursing students, I applaud Senator Merkley for leading this bipartisan effort to advance a congressional solution to recognize post-baccalaureate nursing programs as professional degrees,” said Dr. Deborah Trautman, President and Chief Executive Officer for the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. “Maintaining access to critical healthcare services rests on having a

robust supply of nurses prepared to serve as advanced practice nurses, faculty, researchers, and in other expert roles. Passing this legislation will help schools of nursing meet this need and mitigate the shortage of both clinicians and the faculty who teach them.”

“It’s ironic that we find ourselves here just after National Nurses Week, a time when we are meant to celebrate and honor the very people who keep our health system running. And

yet, this Department of Education has chosen to make it harder for nurses to advance their education and their careers,” said Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, PhD, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, President of the American Nurses Association. “I want to thank Senators Merkley and Wicker for their commitment to writing legislation that will fix this easily avoidable disaster for the nursing profession and patients. Make no mistake, this is not a technicality or

a footnote. This rule will be felt in real communities, for example, in rural areas where nurse practitioners, midwives, and nurse anesthetologists are often the only providers of core care services.”

In addition to Senators Wicker and Merkley, the bipartisan Nursing is a Professional Degree Act is co-sponsored by U.S. Senator Cynthia Lummis (R-WY).

A bipartisan companion bill was introduced in the House of Representatives.

# Tomas Valincius Wins 2026 Ferriss Trophy

By: Logan Lowery, Assistant Director/Communications

JACKSON – Tomas Valincius has made his first season in Maroon and White a memorable one.

The Mississippi State sophomore pitcher has already picked up numerous honors for his mound prowess this year. On Monday, Valincius added another to his collection by being named the Ferriss Trophy winner for 2026.

The Ferriss Trophy is presented annually to the top collegiate player in the Magnolia State at the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum. He claimed the honor over finalists Grayden Harris (Southern

Miss), Ace Reese (MSU), Cade Townsend (Ole Miss) and Judd Utermark (Ole Miss).

Valincius has made 14 starts this season going 9-2 with a 3.04 earned run average, 112 strikeouts and only 17 walks in 80 innings of work. The Lockport, Illinois, native is tied for the SEC lead in wins, is second in strikeouts, fourth in innings, and fifth in ERA. He has struck out 86 batters in SEC play, more than any other pitcher in the conference.

An MSU player has won the Ferriss Trophy 10 times during its 22 years of existence, the most of any program. Former Bulldogs to claim the Ferriss Trophy are

Thomas Berkery (2006), Ed Easley (2007), Chris Stratton (2012), Hunter Renfro (2013), Jake Mangum (2016, 2019), Brent Rooker (2017), Tanner Allen (2021) and Dakota Jordan (2024).

Mangum is the only two-time winner of the Ferriss Trophy. The award is named in honor of former Diamond Dawg legend Dave “Boo” Ferriss.



(USPS 247-680) HOLMES COUNTY HERALD

Periodicals postage paid at Lexington, Mississippi by Holmes County Herald, Lexington, Mississippi.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Holmes County Herald, P.O. Box 60, Lexington, MS 39095. Published each Thursday at 308 Court Square, Lexington, MS 39095. Telephone 662-834-1151; Fax 662-834-1074; Email hcherald@gmail.com; Website www.holmescountyherald.com

Maria Edwards.....Publisher Julie Ellison...Gen. Manager

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

**In Holmes County - \$40.00**

**In Mississippi - \$45.00**

**Outside Mississippi - \$55.00**

**Senior Citizen Discount**

**\$1.00 of f above pri**



**May 28** - Joe W. and Carolyn C. Smart, T.B. and Isabelle Nichols

**May 29** - Rufus and Belinda Waddell

**May 30** - Derek and Elizabeth Walker, Robbie and Reba Robertson

**May 31** - Virgil and Rossie King

**June 1** - Guy and Liz Taylor, Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Riley, Randy and Linsey Stewart

**June 2** - Pablo and Randi Hernandez ST, Luke and Lauren Eaton, Owen and Natalie McLellan, Reid and Anna Sumrall

**June 3** - Tanner and Mary Kate Bartlett

To add your birthdays and anniversaries to our list, please send your information by mail to P.O. Box 60, Lexington, MS 39095; fax 662-834-1074; email to hcherald@gmail.com; or stop by our office at 308 Court Square in Lexington. No phone calls, please.

# Alexander of Tchula is on the Northwest President's List

SENATOBIA, MS - Ce-daijah Alexander of Tchula is on the President's List for the Spring 2026 semester at Northwest Mississippi Community College. The

students who are included are full-time students who completed the semester with a grade point average of 3.75 to 4.0.



**May 28** - Emily Murphree, Katherine Riley, Johnny Donelson, Matthew Watson, Walker Wentworth

**May 29** - Clifton Atkinson, Weston Killebrew

**May 30** - Terry Wynne, Chloe Word, Jeanette Davis, April Marrone, Brittany Edwards, Portia Riley, Margaret Roberts

**May 31** - Renee Wynne, LaTrice Porter, Lucille Smith, Eryca Edwards Gilmore, B. Ledbetter, Ruby Moore, June Durff, Mickey Chisolm, William Powell

**June 1** - Amber Ratliff King, Gabrielle Lawson, Debra Williams

**June 2** - Harold Hammett, Trace Harrell, Wyatt Allen, Lucas Allen, Samantha Shuler, Adam Hester, Ginger Perry, Jay McBride, Veronique Tooles, Sharon Smart

**June 3** - Greg Bigbee, Jax Tate, Elma Garnett, David Dillon, Rule Pierce, Linda P. Gercens, Bobby Killebrew, Anissa McGinnis, Courtney Pemberton, Tawanna Jefferson



**WEST GROVE MB CHURCH**

West Grove MB Church, 472 West Grove Road, Lexington, will recognize Sister

Jacqueline Spell on Sunday, May 31 at 11:00 a.m.

5-21,28

## Mortimer-Southern

### FUNERAL HOME

100 Pine Street, Lexington, MS 39095

662-834-2607