

**Opening Statement of Big 12 Conference
Commissioner Kevin Weiberg to the Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection**

December 7, 2005

**Topic: Determining a Champion on the Field: A Comprehensive Review of the
BCS and Postseason College Football**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee: my name is Kevin Weiberg and I am the commissioner of The Big 12 Conference, an association of 12 universities from the Midwest and Great Plains Regions.

The Big 12 Conference office currently serves as the coordinating office for the Bowl Championship Series. This is an assignment that rotates every two years among the conferences that are part of the BCS arrangement. In January, the BCS coordination responsibilities will move to the Southeastern Conference office and Commissioner Mike Slive.

The Bowl Championship Series, formed in 1998, has always had relatively simple objectives: among those is an aim to match the number one and number two ranked teams, through a ranking system consisting of two human polls and six computer polls, in a season-ending bowl game. The BCS also provides a means by which other highly regarded teams can be matched together to create quality bowl match-ups.

Decisions concerning the BCS arrangement are made by a presidential oversight committee, a group of university presidents and chancellors, with advice from conference commissioners, athletics directors and coaches.

The BCS arrangement is reviewed annually by all eleven Division I-A conference commissioners and an athletics director advisory panel. We also seek the advice of representatives of the American Football Coaches Association on certain matters. When

we believe that some adjustment is appropriate, we make modifications to the arrangement in an effort to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives.

The BCS is but a small part of the landscape of post-season college football; it consists of only four games – the Fiesta, Orange, Rose, and Sugar bowls. Post-season college football in Division I-A, however, encompasses far more than just the BCS games. Today, there are 28 bowl games hosted by cities as diverse as Detroit and El Paso.

There are often calls for participants in college football to jettison the bowl system for an NFL-style playoff. A change could occur only as a result of legislation in the NCAA, and the NCAA's constituent groups – presidents, faculty, athletics directors, coaches – have not proposed such legislation.

An NFL-style playoff would bring with it certain costs for the game, student-athletes, and the many communities that annually welcome teams and fans for bowl games. That the bowl structure has endured for so long is a testament to its benefits and the unique role that it plays in college football.

For more than a century, the traditional reward for Division I-A college football teams completing successful seasons has been a berth in a post-season bowl. While the BCS uses the existing bowl structure in an effort to determine a national champion, the bowl system itself provides numerous other benefits that better the game. The bowls annually provide approximately 5,600 student-athletes with rich and meaningful postseason competitive and educational opportunities. The bowls are more than football games played during the holiday season. They are civic celebrations that may center around football games but include a host of events, including parades, basketball tournaments and other sporting events, social events, and charitable activities. The bowls

do a great job of allowing student-athletes the opportunity to spend approximately a week in a community enjoying the many attractions and hospitality offered by the host bowl committee.

Bowl games also provide significant economic development, charitable and volunteer service benefits for their communities. For example, the Sugar Bowl estimates that its January 2005 game between Auburn and Virginia Tech created an economic impact in the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana of nearly \$210 million. State and local governments realized nearly \$16 million in tax revenues as a result of the game. As the city of New Orleans continues to rebuild from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina, we believe that the impact of events such as the Sugar Bowl, which annually lures thousands of visitors to New Orleans during the holiday season, will be a significant part of those efforts.

College football is different from the NFL. There are 119 Division I-A college football teams, and we need a system that provides a large number of those teams with a postseason opportunity. The NFL, with only 32 teams, can make a 12-team playoff work nicely within its structure.

It is important to note that each year 119 members of NCAA Division I-A can begin the season with a goal of playing in a bowl game and 56 teams can make that dream a reality. Most playoff plans that have been proposed would be limited to a relatively small number of teams. The bowl system, on the other hand, provides post-season opportunities for many deserving teams that would not qualify for a national playoff. I can think of several examples from the Big 12 Conference where teams have qualified for bowl games with six or seven wins, then went on to have a successful bowl

experience and used that as a springboard to greater success in future years. Programs like those at Kansas State University and Texas Tech University come to mind.

The bowl system also heightens the excitement of college football's most valuable asset, its regular season. College football teams are rewarded for consistency over an entire season. Results in September have far reaching effects as teams progress through their season. Excitement builds as fans point to late-season match-ups, the outcomes of which will affect hopes of conference championships and postseason bowl berths.

Beyond the significance of its regular season, college football is unique for its campus environment. Whether it is 50,000 fans in Ames, Iowa or 80,000 in College Station, Texas, a college football weekend, on campus, is the essence of the sport. The ability to connect thousands of fans, alumni and supporters with our campuses during the regular season and to celebrate not only college football, but a university's many other educational and extracurricular activities, is an opportunity that our schools cannot afford to lose.

Under the bowl system, we maximize the importance of regular season games, which encourages alumni and fans to come to our games on campus. Further, the current system places a high level of importance on every regular season game. That is why early season games take on such great significance in this structure, because every game counts.

A playoff system, however, could alter that dynamic. For those teams that do not qualify for the playoffs, especially those that begin the season poorly, the regular season may lose much of its meaning. The chase for a bowl berth, on the other hand, places a tangible goal in front of teams even if the national championship is not in the picture.

Furthermore, the bowl system adds significance to games. The Texas-Texas A&M match-up in my conference on Thanksgiving weekend is a good example. Certainly, the rivalry is of great interest to the fans of the two institutions and its tradition attracts fans nationwide. But the game had a lot of significance this year, because of the bowl system and the BCS. First, Texas entered unbeaten and ranked number 2. A loss might have ended its hope of a national championship. Second, because Texas A&M entered the game with a 5-5 record, a victory would have made it eligible for a bowl berth. Neither would have been the case had there been a playoff. Texas would likely have clinched a playoff berth long before the game, so the outcome of the game would have had only minimal effect on its national championship hopes. Furthermore, because Texas A&M had lost five games, a victory would likely not have secured a playoff berth for the team.

The reality is that an NFL-style playoff structure carries with it the risk of devaluing the regular season, particularly games played late in the season. Indeed, to some degree, playoffs alter the ordinary incentives that are attached to any game. In playoff structures in other sports, once a certain spot is secured, coaches' concerns shift to preparing for the playoffs and away from late regular-season games. This is true in a number of sports. In baseball, for example, once a team clinches a division title, starters are rested and pitching rotations are set up for a playoff series.

The bowl system may also better accommodate a student-athlete's academic and physical well-being. Bowl games are conducted at times that do not conflict with institutional exam schedules. Under the current system, the schedule is confined to thirteen or fourteen games in a single academic semester. This is a manageable number of

contests and is better from a health and safety perspective when compared to an NFL-style playoff structure that could extend the season three or four games for some teams.

In closing, the future direction of college football continues to be managed within the context of higher education. University presidents and chancellors seek a balance between the academic missions of their institutions and the desire of fans for a system to crown a national champion. We want to maintain the significance of the regular season and support a vibrant postseason bowl structure that provides a maximum number of opportunities for student-athletes.

I am willing to continue to work to improve the current system in a way that may help to address concerns about the determination of the national champion with the following caveats:

- Presidents and chancellors of our universities need to authorize us to explore models that include teams playing more than one game in the postseason;
- Such models must not result in fewer postseason playing opportunities for student-athletes;
- The regular-season must continue to have high significance, much more than just teams playing for seeds; and,
- Any format must be reasonable for student-athletes including adequate recovery time between games and no added intrusion on the institutional academic calendar.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some background on the bowl system and its importance to college football. I look forward to answering your questions.