

# 31<sup>st</sup> & Pearl

## Bad President Fatigue

The recent USMNEWS.net [editorial](#) about the dedication of a USM-GC education center to former USM president Horace Fleming struck a chord with many. Fleming may have become USM's greatest president if only the USM family had properly accepted him. He fought hard for USM's share of public support, and he sought to augment that with private donations. Sure, he was not Aubrey Lucas. But then again, Lucas sat in the stands and watched the Shelby Thames administration dismantle just about everything that was good about the institution. It's difficult to imagine Fleming doing the same, as it is to imagine Fleming choosing to hold the title of president *emeritus* and drawing a near-six figure salary for years in that position.

Just a few weeks ago current USM president Martha Saunders sat on the sidelines and watched the Mississippi IHL Board engage in dismantling many of the protections that academic tenure was meant to provide. She did nothing, except hide her face behind her hand, pretending to read over some documents while IHL folks volleyed back and forth about how many days notice terminated faculty need be given. When Saunders returned to report this issue to the USM faculty senate, one senator pointed out that *Saunders* would not always be president, and that some past USM presidents would have *taken advantage* of these looser protections. What was missing in all of this was a protest of what Saunders had*n't* done about the situation, as well as any *real* reason to believe Saunders doesn't play loose and fast at times.

Saunders has been terminating faculty left and right since summer of 2009. With an additional \$15 to \$20 million in budget cuts coming, that's likely what she'll spend the next several weeks prepping to do once again. Then there's the \$2 million plane lease she signed in the dark of night during the worst fiscal crisis in memory. Add to that centennial gateways, new central administrators for student retention, MIDAS programs for science faculty, and all the rest. What is now going on at USM is a sort of *bad president fatigue*. No one is willing to examine Saunders under the same microscope that Thames was placed under for fear of a state higher education system that will deliver to the former state teachers college someone worse. That's a really sad position to be in for sure. Still, some harsh criticisms are going to have to be leveled at some point, and the sooner the better. Getting up from a bad president fatigue (or malaise) isn't easy, but that's true for just about everything worth doing.

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31st & Pearl is a series housed at [usmnews.net](#) that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.