

31st & Pearl

Got Confidence?

With all of the incompetence at the top of the management hierarchy at Southern Miss, there is still nothing resembling even a whisper about holding a “no confidence” election regarding USM president Martha Saunders. Sure, the fact that the institution has had to shave \$25 million from its state allocation in 2010 and 2011 is not Saunders’ fault. But, she did respond to the cuts by issuing almost 50 terminal letters to various tenured and tenure-track faculty in Hattiesburg and Long Beach, while none of the state’s seven other public universities has responded by canning its tenured/tenure-track professors.

Perhaps the *mismanagement* at the top of USM is best reflected in Saunders’ decision to commit \$2 million leasing a Beechcraft King Air in the midst of the nation’s worst economic situation since the Great Depression. Or, it may instead be her \$300,000 presidential mansion bedroom renovation. The list seems to go on and on, and the general public is catching on, even if many USM faculty aren’t yet doing so themselves. If the wider “USM family” held a “no confidence” vote on Saunders today, the result would likely be a resounding “no.”

What will it take for the USM faculty to get to the same mental place? Perhaps another \$10 million in budget cuts – the amount being talked about for FY 2013 – will do it. Or, maybe a mid-year budget cut that adds to the \$10 million reduction to the current FY 2011 budget. No one seems to know how far away the USM faculty is from the state of mind that produces an election on Saunders’ leadership. One thing does seem certain, and that is after two years at the bottom of *U.S. News & World Report’s* overall ranking, and three or more years of budget cuts, USM is being dismantled little by little, and on a national stage. Yes, the academic world is watching . . . and now waiting for the next shoe to drop. Only time will tell if the next price is paid by Saunders, or (once again) by the USM family.

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