

31st & Pearl

Is Saunders Paranoid?

During her 8-Sept-2011 Fall Convocation presentation, USM president Martha Saunders addressed a so-called “undercurrent of doubt” surrounding the USM cheer, “To the Top!” According to Saunders, there are doubters on the Southern Miss campus regarding the veracity of the cheer. To her, some have no faith that USM will reach, or is even headed towards, the top. To address these unnamed people, Saunders proclaimed that USM gets its fair share of Mississippi taxpayer dollars, despite what conventional wisdom says, or what anyone thinks about that situation. She also proclaimed that USM *is* a great university, and that no matter who wins the 2011 Mississippi gubernatorial race, he will be a USM alum. Finally, to those who would foster something like the aforementioned “undercurrent of doubt,” Saunders retorted, *You are wrong . . . and out of excuses.*

The whole scene was bizarre. It came out of left field, and almost as if the USM faculty had recently undertaken, or was considering, a “no confidence” vote in Saunders, her cabinet, and/or someone in her administration. What is one to make of it all? Well, of all of the conclusions one might apply, it seems clear that Saunders is paranoid about her place in the “USM family.” During the speech, she recounted the number of years, months and days she has served as president of the 100 year old institution since her arrival back in May of 2007. She converted these figures into hours, and then even into minutes. Her speeches, and the fact that she archives them, suggest that she is hyper-concerned about her legacy at USM. Perhaps all of the strain of the past few years – in many ways dreadful ones for the USM community -- is coming to a head, and leading the ninth president of USM to begin to suspect that everyone around her is snickering at her plans and activities vis-à-vis leading the university. If so, things might get worse before getting any better.

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