

31st & Pearl

It's Not an Elephant, It's a Plane

USM president Martha Saunders told the USM family members gathered on 14-Sept-2010 for the fall 2010 convocation that it would be insulting of her to deliver the 2010-11 *State of the University* address and not mention the “elephant in the room.” That elephant is, of course, the recent \$15 million budget cut that has left 29 tenured and tenure-track faculty members without jobs, and a much larger number of USM students without their academic majors (programs). However, completely lost in Saunders’ speech about tough choices, hard realities, and the absolute necessity to trim and reallocate the institution’s budget was one, large Beechcraft King Air airplane. How large you ask? Try \$1.9 million, or more than 25% of the size of the FY 2012 budget cuts effected to date by Saunders et al., with the remaining balance expected to come from faculty furloughs and a retirement incentive program.



As long as Saunders refuses to acknowledge her complicity in the current crisis – choosing instead to talk about elephants and the national recession instead of the ill-advised decision to lease the plane – she is being disingenuous with the same USM family referred to above. Where did Saunders’ address go from the elephant? In almost the same breath that she produced the elephant quip, she went on to state that *by every metric that counts*, things are looking up at Southern Miss. Apparently, nothing religion professor Daniel Capper is doing now, or has been doing for years, really counts. Onward and upward, right? Now, Capper prepares to salvage his academic career while Saunders plans for great things ahead at USM.

In some ways, the address on USM’s centennial this year seemed, and sounded, more like a funeral than a 100th birthday celebration. It also appears that even Saunders no longer believes her own rhetoric. Listening closely one detected a crack in her voice as she closed with the tired and worn phrase, “Southern Miss . . . To the Top.”

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