

31st & Pearl

Parse with Care

As well-liked as *The Hattiesburg American's* higher education reporter Ed Kemp generally is, concerned citizens of the USM community should be careful in reading too much into his [recent characterization](#) of the rumor that Mississippi IHL commissioner Hank Bounds is a candidate to replace outgoing USM president Martha Saunders. After the 4-May-2012 USM faculty senate meeting, Kemp wrote, “[a]t least a couple of rumors lost oxygen Friday [4-May-2012]. One, articulated by Sens. Dick Conville and Bob Press with nods of agreement from other senators, that Bounds seeks the Southern Miss presidency was shot down by Bounds himself.” Just how did Bounds squash this particular rumor? By stating, “I do not intend to be a candidate [for the USM presidency].”

How about we repeat Bounds’ comment, *emphasizing* the key term therein: “I do not *intend* to be a candidate [for the USM presidency].” That is a classic non-denial denial if there ever was one. Those of you who think this particular response from Bounds closes the door on *the possibility* that he succeeds Saunders as USM president should [dig into the history](#) of how Saunders’ predecessor, Shelby Thames, became president of USM. Thames started the 2001-02 search for a successor to Horace Fleming (USM’s seventh president) *as a member of the presidential search committee*, and he ended that 2001-02 search *as USM’s eighth president*. Certainly someone who is placed on a presidential search committee does not intend to be a candidate for that presidency, much less its eventual winner. That term – “intend” – can be very slippery. Those who are buying into the notion that the air is now gone from the rumor about Bounds being a future USM president should handle that term with care.

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