

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

## Parsing Plane Talk

The recent *Student Printz* article about the USM plane raises more concerns than it actually addresses. First, USM president Martha Saunders appears to realize the ill-advised nature of the decision to lease the plane from the USM Foundation. In the article she talks about the possibility of time-sharing with other Mississippi universities as a cost-saving idea. That raises the issue of sharing the plane with local Hattiesburg businesses, which Saunders claimed at the outset would be done to lower costs. What happened to this plan? One suspects it never got off the ground, as local businesses aren't supported by taxpayers and are feeling the economic crunch out there.

Saunders also tells readers that there's nothing that can be done about the lease until it expires years from now. Is that really true? University foundations are set up to support universities, not the other way around. And, leases are terminated on mutual agreement all the time. That said, couldn't the Foundation put the plane up for sale, and when a buyer is found allow USM out of the obligation? Sure it could. Saunders' statement about the lease being unalterable simply sounds like an attempt to deflect attention away from some of the real possibilities that exist here.

Other Mississippi universities now face the constant possibility of being merged in one way or another. There is little chance any of them would be interested in some sort of time-share on USM's plane at this time. Budgets are tight. The economy is struggling. People are hurting. Where's the critical thinking on this and other public concerns?

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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.*