

Air Farce One Continues to Hound Saunders

USM president Martha Saunders' 2008-09 decision to lease a Beechcraft airplane from the USM Foundation continues to hound her USM presidency. Marika Smith's Feb-10 article for *The Student Printz* entitled [House votes to sell Mississippi's state jet](#) revisits Saunders' ill-advised decision in the context of growing pressure in Mississippi's legislative to sell the state's airplane. According to Smith, the MS House voted 66-54 in favor of putting the MS jet on the auction block, where some believe it could fetch up to \$3.2 million - money that could go to shore up the state's car tag fund. Smith also reminds all of Saunders' decision to sign a lease, through 2013, for a USM plane. In these days of massive budget cuts, Smith reminds readers that Saunders' decision to lease the plane has been a contentious one since the lease was made public.

Saunders now appears to be showing the strain of her decision, indicating to Smith that future plans may have USM developing a time-sharing plan with other MS universities that would remove some of the financial burden from USM. Still, any action Saunders could make will have to await the 2013 ending date on the current lease agreement with the USM Foundation. As Saunders told Smith, "[w]e will take a look at the pros and cons of time-sharing when the lease is up in a few years. At this point, we do not have the option of making any changes in that lease."

The conclusion of Smith's article, shown below, paints the real picture facing USM vis-à-vis Saunders plane lease decision.

At the moment, the question of the lease of the USM Foundation plane is up in the air. Because the university does not have the luxury of altering the lease at this time, the administration is forced to cut funding from other areas of the Southern Miss community.