

And now for something really stupid...

Football season is upon us. Will President Bennett use the very expensive airplane past President Saunders bought with student and taxpayer money, to continue junkets for IHL members, politicians and family members?

Previous usmnews.net reports chronicled the millions squandered on the luxury airplane. Keep in mind, all information in our reports was obtained from USM through Mississippi Open Records Act requests, that is, the information comes from USM's own records. One report is offered again as a context to ask a fundamental question about the current USM President Bennett.

Readers express disbelief that an airplane, N777AQ, could cost so much as we've reported at usmnews.net. If you have doubts, let me offer again that you review the details for yourselves. A good place to start [is here](#). The decision, then-president Saunders' decision, was verifiably incompetent. An incompetent decision that the IHL and other USM administrators approved and continue to support. N777AQ was and continues to be paid for by uninformed taxpayers and USM students. And now, USM's new president, Rodney Bennett, is taking full advantage of this financially unsound use of N777AQ.

The question you should ask yourselves is: What other financially disastrous decisions have the IHL, USM administrators, and USM faculty made? See, usmnews.net's archives. It provides insight why the cost of higher education at USM has increased year after year for more than a decade. The IHL and university administrators would like to pacify you with their complaint about reduced state support is the reason for the increased tuition and fees. Don't let them get away with it. Review the documents we've gotten from the IHL and USM and learn what they're really doing with your money.

In Part 10, we reported that on February 4, 2013, [Mississippi taxpayers and USM students](#) paid a small fortune to fly the IHL designated "preferred candidate" Rodney Bennett to Hattiesburg for a "campus visit." By February 4, 2013, Bennett knew he would be the next Southern Miss president.

USM's records reported that the number of flight hours to taxi Bennett from Athens, GA to USM was 4.5. That translates a cost to students and taxpayers in the amount of **\$31,235**. That's approximately \$31,000 more than the cost of a commercial ticket. Also, keep in mind, I'm not including the costs of automobile transportation to/from the airports, food, lodging, etc. Just the plane ride: **\$31,235!**

And again.

In Part 11, we reported that on February 6, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid another small fortune to fly Temple Bennett, the IHL designated "preferred candidate" Rodney

Bennett's wife to Hattiesburg from Athens, GA. The cost? **\$22,211**. That's approximately \$22,000 more than the cost of a commercial ticket.

Let's keep a running total of these flights using USM's airplane, N777AQ: **\$53,446!** That's for just two flights taxiing the Bennetts from Athens. The really bad news is that the Bennetts' extravagance has just begun.

And again, in Part 12, we reported that on February 6, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid another small fortune to fly USM "president" Rodney Bennett from Hattiesburg to Athens, GA, then to Oxford, MS. The cost? **\$19,435**. Keep in mind, I'm not including the costs of automobile transportation to/from the airports, food, lodging, etc. Just the plane ride.

Let's continue the running total: **\$72,881**.

And yet again!

On February 7, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid another small fortune to fly USM "president" Rodney Bennett from Oxford, MS, to Hattiesburg, back to Oxford, then to Athens, GA, back to Meridian, then Gulf Port and on to Hattiesburg. Bennett was accompanied by IHL members Smith and Blakeslee. The number of flight hours was 6.4. The cost of this flight service was **\$44,422**.

Let's continue the running total: **\$117,303**.

Bennett's not done yet!

On February 11, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid another small fortune to fly USM "president" Rodney Bennett from Athens, GA to Hattiesburg. The number of flight hours was 3.3. The cost of this flight was **\$22,905**. USM's Interdepartmental Invoice states the purpose: "To get Dr. Bennett to campus on a timely manner to participate in the Governor's press conference relative to the needs after the tornado and discuss plans relative to recovery from the tornado damage."

Have they lost their minds? you should ask. Bennett wasn't the president of USM at the time or even an employee of USM at the time or even a resident of Mississippi at the time. Rushing Bennett around in a ridiculously expensive airplane accomplished nothing except a public relations stunt to introduce "an IHL designated candidate for president of USM" that cost Mississippi taxpayers and students **\$22,905!**

Let's continue the running total: **\$140,208**.

Nothing, and I mean nothing, these administrators do dictate an emergency to act so quickly that they need to fly from one location to another at a cost of **\$140,208** over a period of several days. That is, **\$140,208**, so far.

Football season is upon us. Will President Bennett use the very expensive plane, N777AQ, to continue junkets for IHL members, politicians and family members started with the President Saunders administration?

Let's review a report of one of President Saunders' junket trips:

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD TWO ROUND TRIPS TO OMAHA NE COST? USM'S ANSWER: \$72,395.74

To Omaha, NE And Back

On June 14 and 16, 2009, the Interdepartmental Invoice represents that "Dr. Saunders & **guests**" and "Chad Driskell & **guests**" flew on N777AQ to Omaha, NE to watch the **College World Series**. The Interdepartmental Invoices were the initial response from USM to a Mississippi Open Records Act (MORA) request concerning the multi-million dollar plane President Saunders leases and pays for with Mississippi taxpayer and student money. They were incomplete. For example, who are the "**guests**"? We requested the details in our original MORA request. We recently received more details. (We may not have all the details, yet. USM administrators are inclined to hide what they do. See past-Dean Doty's characterization of USM's Foundation as a "booze account.") Let's see what details President Saunders had left out of our original MORA request.

We now have the pilot's log. The pilot's log of the Omaha flight provides the passenger list. "Guests" included: Joe Bailey (President Saunders' husband), Jack Driskell (a relation of Chad Driskell?), Doug Rouse (IHL member), Joe and Connie Morgan (former Chief Financial Officer at USM and spouse), Bob Pierce (Vice President for Advancement at USM), Johnny Atherton (vice president of external affairs for Mississippi Power Company), Billy Hewes (MS state senator), Jay McDowell (former assistant athletic director), Richard Giannini (athletic director), John Brown (unknown but possibly football prospect), and Johnny Dupree (mayor of Hattiesburg). Why are these people flying to a baseball game at the expense of taxpayers and students? What is President Saunders doing flying these IHL Board Members and politicians around the country?

The Interdepartmental Invoice shows the flight was charged to the "President's Office," i.e., students and taxpayers. The flight time was 5.8 hours x 2 according to the Interdepartmental Invoice but the pilot's log shows that the plane made two trips back from Omaha on June 16 to bring back all the passengers, one showing 3.3 flight hours and the other showing 5.7 flight hours.

The ACTUAL cost was **\$72,395.74**.

\$72,395.74 of taxpayer and student money was spent so that President Saunders can chauffeur her husband, politicos, IHL members, upper administrators, and spouses to a sporting event, this time a BASEBALL GAME!?

And here we go with another big time sports season, this time football. The question is: Will President Bennett do the same dumb and expensive junkets Saunders did in the upcoming football season?