

Aunt Martha's Extravagance

Part 3 – 'In her plane she's going to Carolina'

Via a Mississippi Open Records Act request, USMNEWS.net recently obtained a large batch of documents from USM relating to USM president Martha Saunders' university aircraft. This series, *Aunt Martha's Extravagance*, provides analysis of these documents. This installment highlights a 28-Nov-09 trip to Greenville, North Carolina, made by Saunders, her executive assistant Chad Driskell, and Mississippi IHL Board Member and local Hattiesburg doctor Doug Rouse. The "Interdepartmental Invoice" from that junket is inserted below, and it shows that USM charged itself \$4,600 for the trio to make this trip.

(Mark in Field)
 Original
 Department Copy
 (Return to File)

INTERDEPARTMENTAL INVOICE
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
 (FOR CAMPUS USE ONLY)

Date: 11/23/2009

CHARGE: President's Office DEPARTMENT NAME
 5001 266-5001
 BOX PHONE NUMBER

CREDIT: Airplane Operations DEPARTMENT NAME
 5003 255-4136
 BOX PHONE NUMBER

QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION OF GOODS OR SERVICES, INCLUDING DATES OF SERVICE	UNIT PRICE	AMOUNT
	5.75 Hour Round Trip to Greenville, NC for Dr. Martha Saunders, Chad Driskell, Doug Rouse	4,600.00	4,600.00
	Trip November 28, 2009		
TOTAL →			4,600.00

SPA APPROVAL, IF REQUIRED _____
 SIGNATURE DATE

PROVOST APPROVAL, IF REQUIRED _____
 SIGNATURE DATE

ACCOUNTING INFORMATION	ACCOUNT	FUND	DEPTID	PROGRAM	PROJECT/GRANT	AMOUNT
BUDGET STRINGS TO CHARGE FOR SERVICES OR MATERIALS RECEIVED	804021	10H10	100001	06000		4600.00
AUTHORIZED DEPARTMENT SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____						
BUDGET STRINGS TO CREDIT FOR SALES OF SERVICES OR MATERIALS	804021	10H10	100011	06000		4600.00
AUTHORIZED DEPARTMENT SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____						

JOURNAL NUMBER: _____
 JOURNAL DATE: _____

Signed original - Controller's Office - Rm 5143

Aside from the expense of it, this trip raises a number of questions. First, why is Saunders' executive assistant Chad Driskell, pictured below, [allowed to use](#) the university plane to attend athletics events? While the invoice mentions dates and location, it fails to mention that USM played East Carolina in football that day,

and that the location of that game was Greenville. USM lost that game, 20 to 25, en route to a 7-6 season that included a loss to Middle Tennessee State a few weeks later. For this mediocre performance, USM head coach Larry Fedora was [rewarded with](#) a one-year contract extension and a \$35,000 raise, leading to his new base pay of \$685,000. Second, why is Rouse, pictured below, on board for this junket? Clearly, one understands that Saunders would like as many opportunities for one-on-one visits with IHL Board members. So would the presidents of the state's other universities. However, aren't there ethics rules against this type of association? How can the presidents of Alcorn State, Mississippi Valley State, and/or Jackson State, etc. feel like they are getting fair treatment from the state's higher education board when USM's president is offering IHL board members relaxing trips to Carolina for late-season college football action?



Chad Driskell

Doug Rouse

On 28-August-2010, *The Hattiesburg American's* higher ed reporter Ed Kemp reported that a number of CoAL faculty, representing foreign languages, philosophy, and religion, were terminated by the Saunders administration in response to the FY2012 budget cut of \$15 million. Kemp noted that tears were being shed by students, faculty, and staff in USM's liberal arts building the previous day (27-August-2010), as the news became public. Many more tears will likely be shed on Monday, 30-August-2010, when the larger USM community will be informed of numerous other faculty terminations throughout the campus. Will, on Thursday, 2-September-2010, Saunders, Driskell et al. fly out to Columbia, South Carolina, to enjoy the Golden Eagles' 2010 football opener against South Carolina? There is little doubt they will, if for no other reason than to get away from what some are calling a gallows mentality on the USM campus. Having 24/7 access to a Beechcraft King Air makes such get-aways possible. USM faculty like Daniel Capper (Religion), however, will remain behind in order to pick up the pieces of shattered careers.

Does something seem amiss here?