Bennett Visiting USM Campus Today

HATTIESBURG – The Mississippi IHL Board's preferred candidate to replace Martha Saunders as USM's next president, Rodney Bennett of the University of Georgia, is visiting USM's Hattiesburg campus today. As Bennett visits USM officials and other constituents, a number of items related to Bennett's candidacy have surfaced since last week. Prominent among these are anonymous reports that, although the *official* IHL vote on Bennett was 12-0 in favor, the *informal* vote among IHL trustees on Bennett's candidacy was a less-than-enthusiastic 7-5 in favor. Among the five voting against Bennett were, reportedly, all three trustees who hold a degree from USM. According to the IHL website, this group would include Christine Pickering, Robin Robinson and Douglas Rouse. Additionally, anonymous sources indicate that these three trustees supported the candidacy of Joe Paul, USM's vice president of student affairs, the same position that Bennett now holds at UGA.

Pickering   *Robinson*   *Rouse*

Another item that some in the USM community are focusing on now is Bennett's background in student affairs. He has served as Dean of Students at both UGA and Winthrop University, in addition to his current vice presidential post in student affairs at UGA. Many in the USM community prefer a president with a background from the academic side of administration. Of course, this criticism of Bennett would also apply to Paul, who was reportedly supported by some on the IHL Board. Additionally, Bennett holds a doctorate from Tennessee State, an institution ranked well below USM. USM's previous three permanent presidents held doctorates from Vanderbilt, Tennessee and Florida State, all institutions ranked much higher than USM. Finally, Bennett currently holds the academic rank of *associate* professor (in the department of counseling and human development services) at UGA. With that rank, Bennett would be outranked by a large portion of the USM faculty that he is charged with governing.