

Herndon Now Out, 'Tabletgate' Still Boiling

HATTIESBURG – “Mike Herndon has resigned.” With that quote, USM faculty senate president Timothy Rehner opened the 27-Jan-2012 USM faculty senate meeting. As long-time USMNEWS.net readers are aware, Herndon was the USM director of procurements and contracts who became caught up in the so-called Tabletgate scandal. That [scandal involves](#) the improper purchase by USM officials of more than 700 Samsung Galaxy Tab devices, a purchase that consumed about \$440,000 of the USM (iTech) budget. Given [the unauthorized nature](#) of the spending, Herndon, former USM chief information officer Homer Coffman, and former USM provost Robert Lyman were all placed on administrative leave by the Mississippi IHL. Coffman and Herndon have since [resigned](#) their administrative posts at USM. [Lyman resigned](#) his administrative post prior to Tabletgate – in an effort, according to some, to perhaps avoid getting caught up in the imminent scandal – and returned to the USM faculty as a tenured professor of psychology. Lyman was, however, placed on administrative leave by the IHL shortly after USM president [Martha Saunders](#) accepted, citing personal reasons for administrative departure, his resignation.

Despite professing that [she knew](#) of the [existence of the program](#) that aimed to provide several hundred USM students, as a gift, a new Samsung Galaxy device, Saunders [claimed that she was unaware](#) of the means by which more than \$400,000 in taxpayer funds were used to finance the program. Her subsequent attempt to shield Lyman from any Tabletgate involvement went further by providing some indication that such behavior is more tolerable to her administration than it is to the IHL Board, which insisted on the administrative leave punishments that now seem to have spawned the two resignations. In an interesting turn of events, Lyman is not currently teaching any spring 2012 courses at USM, even though his administrative resignation was tendered back in fall 2011. According to Rehner, the Saunders administration is working to maintain Lyman’s tenured faculty position, while the IHL Board apparently wants to maneuver Lyman out of USM altogether.

To Rehner, at least, news of the IHL’s position vis-à-vis Lyman’s future at USM raises serious concerns for USM faculty about what it means to be a full professor and a tenured professor, credentials that Lyman holds. Rehner, [who has](#) in the past been [praised by sources](#), views the IHL’s latest move as a threat to these two academic institutions (rank and tenure). Sources, however, [point out](#) that the IHL’s reaction to the Tabletgate scandal, one that Rehner views as “over the top,” seems more like one

that is focused on *the misappropriation of almost \$0.5 million in taxpayer funds*, and not one that is a threat to long-lived academic institutions. To some, at least, Rehner's incredulity ignores the greater issue in this case, particularly during these tough economic and fiscal times, and it serves to provide fodder for the anti-college professors segment of the general population. To drive home this point, sources point to data that were presented to the faculty senate regarding the distribution of the Galaxy Tabs. Some of these are shown below:

Tablets Purchased:	759
Tablets Tagged:	756
Tablets Stolen:	1
Tablets Lost:	2

A USM official in attendance on 27-Jan-2012 indicated to the senators that 759 Samsung devices were originally purchased. Of these, 756 have been tagged with USM property decals, [as demanded by](#) the Mississippi State Auditor [back in](#) late 2011. Two of the remaining three were lost by their recipients, while the final one was reported stolen. It was at this point that a faculty senator noted that stories, which seem to be rampant on the USM campus, are indicating that many students, reportedly irritated by the Saunders administration's bungling of the program, are [returning the devices](#). In response, the USM official reporting the numbers inserted above indicated that **there are currently 170 of these 756 Samsung Tabs in storage**, a figure indicative of a serious level of discontent among USM students.

USM interim provost [Denis Wiesenburg](#) informed the senate that a number of *faculty* received the Tabs during the original allocation, as did some of those in the *administrative ranks*. The most well-known example in the latter category is IHL commissioner Hank Bounds, [who received a Tab](#) from USM shortly after the giveaway program got on its feet. Wiesenburg also reported receiving one of the devices. Citing Bounds' decision to return the device, the interim provost also noted that he, too, returned his Samsung Tab to USM. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that it is not difficult to see why the IHL maintains its [current position](#) on the matter, given that it appears as though the details of this scandal get worse as time progresses. Wiesenburg's admission of having received a tablet suggests that taxpayers may never know the real extent to which this giveaway program was mishandled, and perhaps also used as [a rewards program](#) for the well-connected (and [well-to-do](#)).