

Is Miles Now Opposed to His Own Plan?

HATTIESBURG – According to Cade Morrow’s 8-Nov-2010 [report](#) for *The Student Printz* entitled “Proposal presents problems,” USM sophomore Daniel Miles is now backing away from his own [proposal to bridge](#) a \$3 million gap in USM’s FY2012 budget that would allow the institution’s religion, philosophy, deaf education, and other programs/faculty to be retained after 2010-11. According to Miles’ proposal, \$192 of the \$384 “tuition tax” that is used to support USM athletics would instead be channeled into academic affairs each year. To make up the \$3 million shortfall that would occur in athletic director Richard Giannini’s athletics department, Miles proposes that USM students begin paying for tickets to USM sports contests. Under the current “tuition tax” system, tickets are provided to students at no charge (other than the tax).



According to Giannini, Miles’ plan creates a major problem for the USM athletics department. To make up the budget shortfall of \$3 million, Giannini informed Morrow that 13,636 USM students would have to each buy one \$220 season ticket package for football. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that, although Giannini’s math is accurate, his assumption that the entire \$3 million be covered by *football* ticket sales (to students) is flawed. Some of the lost revenue could be made up through ticket sales in basketball and baseball, lessening the pressure on football ticket sales. Not only that, Morrow’s report also reiterates that Miles’ program calls upon Giannini to step up efforts to attract private donations. Still, the USM administration is unimpressed by these arguments. USM president Martha Saunders told Morrow that “. . . Giannini has done incredible work in developing private gifts,” adding that the new USM tennis complex was financed with a private gift of about \$1 million. USM student government association president Kasey Mitchell concurs with both Giannini and Saunders, adding that Miles’ proposal faces “. . . a lot of challenges, like getting students used to the idea of buying their tickets.”

Sources tell USMNEWS.net, however, that USM students weren’t allowed any time to get used to an increase in the price of campus parking permits. These [fees climbed](#) from \$50 to \$135 – an increase of 170%! -- at the beginning of fall 2009. Sources also say that Saunders’ example of Giannini’s fundraising prowess is lacking, noting that the University of Alabama’s most recent (2010) expansion of Bryant-Denny Stadium – an addition on the [south end zone](#) that ultimately cost about \$66 million – was “funded entirely with private donations.” At many schools on USM’s level, funding athletics

using *public* dollars (i.e., general fund transfers and tuition taxes) seems to be getting out of hand. As Steve Berkowitz, Jodi Upton, Michael McCarthy, and Jack Gillum point out in their 6-Oct-2010 [story](#) for *USA Today* entitled “How student fees boost college sports amid rising budgets,” during the 2008-09 academic year students were charged more than \$795 million to support sports programs at 222 Division I schools. Even after adjusting for inflation, this total represents an increase of 18% above what was transferred from students to sports in 2005. The *USA Today* figure for the 222 institutions produces an average of about \$3.5 million, meaning that USM is *well above* the typical school with its \$6 million annual tuition-tax take, and not even including a \$0.9 million general fund (E&G) transfer.

The problem that numbers like those above point to is an inability of athletics officials to control costs. Giannini’s problem with Miles’ proposal is that it takes revenue from sports (via the aforementioned tuition tax) without finding a replacement revenue stream. Like a career politician addicted to spending tax dollars, sources point out that Giannini never considers the option of curtailing spending in the USM athletics department in order to bridge the \$3 million gap. Instead, he runs some numbers and reveals to the public how many students will need to purchase a \$220 football season ticket package in order to replace the \$3 million diverted by Miles’ plan. This *inattention* to the costs side of the ledger is, according to sources, a failure of Giannini’s. It was just two years ago that three terminated USM soccer coaches were awarded \$1.2 million by a Forrest County jury after suing Giannini for, in part, the [sexual harassment](#) faced by one of them from Giannini’s *then*-associate AD Sonya Varnell. Depending on how it is viewed, this verdict *wiped out* (1) all of the USM athletics department’s general fund (E&G) transfer from 2008-09 (i.e., about \$900,000), as well as (2) \$300,000, of the approximately \$6 million, of that same year’s tuition tax. As for the “*then*” in the “*then*-associate AD Sonya Varnell” above – as the USM website indicates, Varnell *continues to hold* the [senior associate AD](#) position, essentially placing her second in command of USM’s athletics division.

All of this brings us back to Miles, who told TSP’s Morrow, “[w]ith my proposition, I will not allow athletics to be compromised . . . If . . . athletics will not get enough money [from ticket sales, etc.], then the proposition will go away peacefully. If it is not going to support the university and benefit athletics, then we are not going to do it.” With that said, Miles is, according to sources, effectively putting his budget proposal into *File 13*. And with that decision, sources also add that the USM community is back to *square one* when it comes to bridging the budget gap. As USM political science professor Kate Greene so [clearly put](#) it, *square one* is the operating assumption that (1) athletics *cannot be harmed*, while (2) academic affairs *must be harmed*.