

## USM President Throws Down Gauntlet on CoB ECOers

HATTIESBURG – Reeling from the sting of being told that their academic programs are being cut and that the 9 tenured/tenure-track ECO faculty will be eliminated after 2009-10, the CoB's economists have been "takin' it to the streets" as it were, and telling every media outlet who would listen that the ECOers are being targeted as part of a subterfuge on the part of the USM administration. Apparently, USM president Martha Saunders has had about all she is willing to take from the CoB's economists. This thought comes via Saunders' [latest blog](#), posted to her webpage at 5:14 p.m. on 1-September-09. In that blog, which she entitled "**Do Not Speak of Darker Days**," Saunders discusses the budget crisis that has plagued the institution for at least a year now. There Saunders tells her constituents and interested readers that "[w]e are NOT going to let our budget define us this year. It would be an insult to the good work that surrounds us." More importantly, Saunders also mentions that the text of her 31-August-09 address to USM's executive cabinet has been posted under the **Fall Semester Buzz** banner on the USM homepage.



It is in [Saunders' address](#), which she entitled "Toward a Sustainable Budget," that she faces (head on) some of the comments and behaviors emanating from various USM constituencies in recent days. She particularly takes on the CoB's economists. First, she addresses the story coming from many USM faculty that the proposal to find \$12 million in the University's budget is doomsday scenario planning. In particular, Saunders points out that there are two revenues USM is about to lose. These are (1) the \$7.3 million federal stimulus monies that are no longer coming, and (2) a mid-year budget cut of \$4.5 million that everyone "in the know" thinks is imminent. Of course, these two total \$11.8 million. And as Saunders adds, if not for the \$3.7 million supplemental stimulus that is likely to come for the 2012 budget cycle, USM would be looking at a \$15.5 million (\$11.8 million + \$3.7 million) cut instead of only \$11.8 million.

Second, Saunders explains why across-the-board cuts to achieve the \$11.8 million goal would not be good for the institution. As USM provost Robert Lyman stated in recent days, USM can't be all things to all people. An across-the-board cut says it would like to be all things *lite* to all people. In the administration's view, why diminish everything at USM when some programs that lack value can be carved out, leaving other parts of the institution whole? Though many USM constituencies have promoted the across-the-board approach/argument, sources tell USMNEWS.net that Saunders' rebuttal was aimed primarily at the CoB's 9 economists.

Third, Saunders instructs the USM community that the administration is "open to alternate solutions." But with that instruction comes the following admonition: "Final

decisions will be made on the basis of reasoned arguments, not public relations tactics." Sources say there is no doubt that this statement represents a swipe at the CoB economists, who have been engaging in a public relations war against Saunders for about 2 weeks. They have hurled accusations of "subterfuge," and of various other forms of unethical behavior at the Saunders administration via *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Hattiesburg American*, *The Student Printz* and other media since the cuts were announced. Saunders, according to sources, is telling them via her address that, whatever they are thinking now, they are not winning the public relations war they initiated.

Fourth, Saunders dispels the "lack of representation" argument by pointing out that faculty have had representation regarding the budget crisis through the Academic Planning Group (APG) since January of 2009. According to Saunders, "[t]he [APG] has worked diligently and has made thoughtful recommendations to the executive cabinet." Finally, sources indicate that Saunders takes one last stab at the dissident economists, and she does so in a way that both (1) spells their exit from the institution, and (2) shows that theirs is a path to exit that others may find themselves on. This happens via the statement, "[t]he money will flow again to Southern Miss because we are going to work hard to make that happen. But rest assured, for as long as I am president here, it will flow to the creative, the bold, the determined . . . and the brave."

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