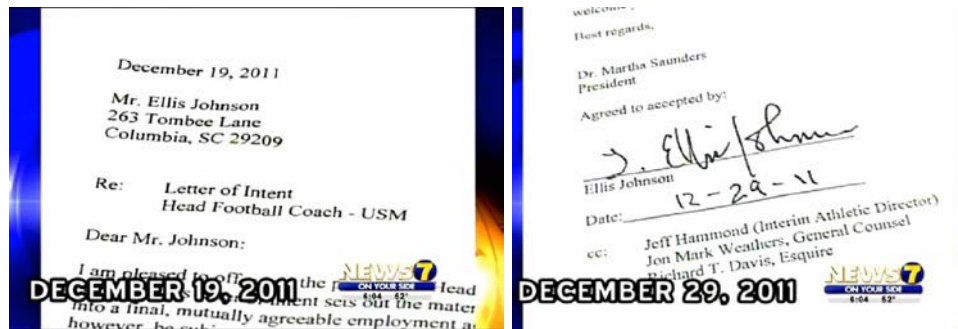


WDAM-TV News: Fingers Point Back to Lucas on Contract

HATTIESBURG – The *WDAM-TV* News team headed by Randy Swan [has delivered](#) yet again, this time on 10-December-2012 by constructing a timeline of events surrounding the contract awarded to former USM football coach Ellis Johnson. The work of Swan’s team turns on its head [the discussion that](#) current interim USM president Aubrey Lucas led with the USM faculty senate back on 7-December-2012.

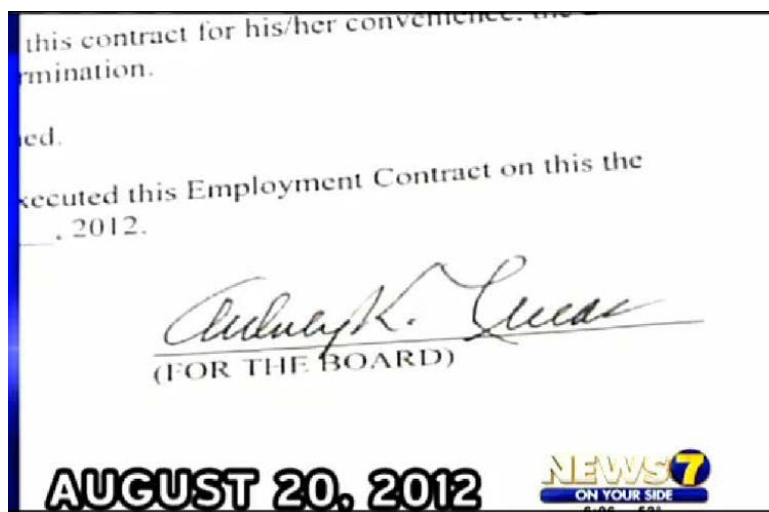


The timeline indicates that Johnson began work for USM from a non-binding “letter of intent” signed by former USM president Martha Saunders, and copied to then-interim USM athletics director Jeff Hammond and current USM legal counsel Jon Mark Weathers. According to *WDAM-TV* News, the letter of intent, dated 19-Dec-2011, contains language that all parties involved would work in good faith to produce a formal employment contract within 90 days of the date of the letter. The next day, 20-Dec-2011, Johnson was introduced by Saunders in a press conference as USM’s new head football coach. Johnson would not sign the letter of intent until 29-December-2011, or 10 days after it was drafted on behalf of Saunders, copying Weathers and Hammond.



Johnson would work well over 90 days under the letter of intent, as the formal contract was not signed by concerned parties until 20-August-2012, or just before the 2012 football season. By

that time, as *WDAM-TV News* reports, Saunders had stepped down as USM's president (occurred on 27-April-2012), replaced by Aubrey Lucas, the current interim president (effective 1-May-2012), while Jeff Hammond had taken the reins as USM's new permanent athletics director (effective 6-June-2012). By the time the formal contract was approved by the Mississippi IHL Board, another suspect party in this saga, and effected on 20-August-2012, Lucas was formally involved, as the insert below showing his signature of approval indicates.



Finally, *WDAM-TV News*' report addresses concerns that former USM athletics director Richard Giannini was involved in the fiasco. The evidence, according to Swan's report, does not support such a conclusion. First, Giannini announced his retirement as USMAD on 8-December-2011, just one day after Larry Fedora announced that he was resigning as head football coach at USM in order to take the same position at the University of North Carolina.



Second, Giannini was immediately replaced by Hammond on an interim basis. With the letter of intent not being drafted until 19-December-2011, and not signed by Johnson until 29-Dec-2011, the timeline, along with his 10-December-2012 interview with Swan, supports Giannini's case of non-involvement. Lastly, by the time the contract was signed on 20-August-2012, Giannini was long since removed from USM.

As Swan's report concludes, the parties at fault here appear to be Hammond, Lucas, Saunders, Weathers, and the IHL Board. At his 7-December-2012 discussion with the faculty senate, Lucas appeared to want to blame Saunders and Giannini. In doing so, Lucas set the wheels turning on a process that would implicate *himself*, *Hammond*, *Saunders*, *Weathers* and *the IHL Board*.