

## **Will USM Scientists Join Others in Assisting BP?**

HATTIESBURG – A [new report](#) by *The Mobile Press-Register's* Ben Raines indicates that BP is offering university scientists “signing bonuses” and “lucrative pay” to assist in its legal defense vis-à-vis the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. According to Raines, BP attempted to hire the entire marine sciences department at the University of South Alabama, but its efforts were thwarted by a provision in the contract that would have prohibited the USA scientists from publishing their research, sharing research results with other scientists, or speaking about the data they collect – all for the next three years. This information was obtained by the newspaper from (1) interviews with various university scientists and (2) a copy of the contract drafted by BP. The USA scientists have not signed on with BP to date, citing concerns with the various confidentiality agreements established in the contract.

According to USA marine scientist Bob Shipp, USA professors are allowed to contract with BP, provided that they do not exceed the 8-hour limit for outside consulting that is specified by university rules. Reports are circulating, according to Raines, that marine scientists from Texas A&M, Mississippi State, and LSU have signed on to assist BP in its legal defense. USA scientists tell the *Press-Register* that BP is paying \$250 per hour, which Raines indicates amounts to \$104,000 per year at eight hours per week. The *Press-Register* has also learned that scientists are being told by federal officials that those who sign with BP will lose access to federal grant funding for research projects. Raines was also told that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is now making competing offers to scientists working at Gulf Coast universities which are just as restrictive as those coming from BP.

According to sources, the details of Raines' story make for some troubling considerations with regard to USM. USM scientists are certainly not averse to capitalizing on their research efforts. The MIDAS program is staunchly defended by faculty and staff in the CoST. This program, which considerably enriches USM faculty who secure research grants and/or contracts, is also staunchly supported by USM president Martha Saunders, who sources say has been convinced by CoST personnel (and a former USM VP for Research) that MIDAS is a necessary program for securing grants and contracts. These CoST personnel may be, according to sources, very interested in supplementing their USM salaries and MIDAS rewards – and possibly even MURA company returns – with lucrative compensation packages from BP. Also, the individuals potentially involved, like former USM provost and marine scientist Jay Grimes, have, at times, shown that ethical or other considerations are often back-burner notions when it comes to opportunities to make money. Stories about Grimes' involvement in the \$800,000 USM Research Foundation scandal – a scandal that is currently being investigated by a number of Mississippi authorities – provide but one example of the kinds of activities sources say suggest that USM scientists may be attracted by offers from the British oil giant.

After checking out Raines' story, many in the USM and Hattiesburg communities likely believe that USM professors are already on the BP payroll. Perhaps future reporting by *The Sun Herald* or other statewide news sources can shed some light here.