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USM Research Foundation Scandal Heating Up

HATTIESBURG – The 20-April-2010 issue of *The Hattiesburg American* reports that the situation surrounding possible misconduct in the USM Research Foundation has moved from the inquiry stage to the official investigation stage. This suggests that Mississippi officials are on the trail of some significant misdeeds. The [report](#), by THA higher education reporter Ed Kemp entitled “USM Research Foundation’s actions under investigation,” indicates that the Mississippi State Auditor’s office is now seeking to learn whether misdeeds in the USMRF “. . . resulted in a financial loss to taxpayers.” This comment raises further interest in USM’s (and the state’s) definition of foundations – whether they are public or private entities. The Auditor’s concern, along with Saunders’ earlier admission – that university employees were facing remedial measures as a result of this situation – seems to indicate that the public sector is deeply involved. That would support calls for freedom of information-based requests for details from media outlets like THA, *The Clarion Ledger*, *The Sun Herald*, and local/state television affiliates.

Meanwhile, USM Executive Assistant for External Affairs, Chad Driskell, is now speaking to the media on behalf of the Martha Saunders administration. Driskell told Kemp that pending litigation involving the USMRF situation is expected to be filed by 23-April-10. However, when asked about the remedial measures pertaining to USM employees (referenced above), Driskell stated, “I can’t tell . . .” This response led Kemp to report that “Southern Miss officials are keeping mum about [the remedial measures].”



Chad Driskell

According to USM officials, Mississippi Auditor Stacy Pickering was informed about the situation in early March-2010, while the IHL Board and the executive director of the Mississippi Ethics Commission were informed later that same month.

In other news, Mississippi IHL commissioner Hank Bounds visited THA’s editorial staff on 20-April-2010 and stated that the 2011 budget puts the state’s university system 9.5% below the 2010 level. He expects the final budget to cut higher education in MS by 12%, or by more than \$100 million.