

What has the USM Administration Done Now?

HATTIESBURG – With a *The Hattiesburg American* [news story](#) on 17-April-10, which followed a USM press release of 16-April-10 – both discussing cryptic violations of IHL Board policies by the USM Research Foundation – it appears as though the USM administration is heading into another scandal. And, judging by some of the details of these reports, this one seems to have the potential to be as bad as any that USM administrators have confronted in recent memory. The *THA* story, entitled “Auditor looks at USM group,” indicates that the Mississippi auditor’s office “has started an inquiry into the University of Southern Mississippi Research Foundation.” That same *THA* story quotes from a prepared statement released by USM president Martha Saunders. Therein Saunders states that the USM legal counsel and the USMRF Board have concluded that the USMRF may have violated IHL policies. Saunders goes further by stating that she “ha[s] initiated several remedial measures pertaining to university employees” and that the USMRF Board has “hired outside legal counsel and accounting experts to assist in conducting its inquiry” into the situation.



USM president, Martha D. Saunders

Clearly, the problems brewing vis-à-vis the USM Research Foundation appear to be much bigger than conveyed by the gesture made by Saunders in the insert above. With the IHL Board, the Mississippi State Auditor’s Office, the Mississippi Attorney General, the Mississippi Ethics Commission, USM legal counsel, outside legal counsel, and outside accounting experts all involved, this situation cannot be anything other than serious. Not only that, Saunders’ use of the term “university employees” in the comment about “remedial measures” is very intriguing. In the past, the USM administration has maintained that the Foundations are private entities, not subject to open records requests and public scrutiny. By using the phrase “university employees,” it may be the case that individuals holding offices in the Aubrey K. Lucas Administration Building and/or the Trent Lott Center may be under scrutiny in this inquiry. So many questions remain (e.g., why sanction employees before an investigation?), so expect USMNEWS.net to keep an eye on this situation as it develops further.