

Breaking News

Was the BBER Economics Symposium a Plus or a Minus?

HATTIESBURG – Reports coming from the Bureau of Business Research 10-Jan-08 Symposium indicate that the decision to host the event may have been a net minus for the CoB. Valerie Wells, a reporter for *The Hattiesburg American*, attended the day's events and produced a contemporaneous blog on the speakers and the conclusions that were reached. Wells arrived early, and her first observation was about the Thad Cochran Center, venue for the day's activities:

"8:14 a.m. . . . I've never been this deep inside the Cochran Center. It reminds me of a casino . . ."

Later, Wells reported on what was said by Darrin Webb, of the Mississippi IHL:

"9:22 a.m. . . . [According to Webb,] Hurricane Katrina had a positive impact on the Mississippi economy."

At 10:07 a.m., Wells recorded BBER Director, William Gunther, as saying that if he (Gunther) were investing, he'd buy stock in local carpenters. Gunther's comment was disputed at 11:10 a.m. by a reader ("chuck o'luck") of *THA* who was also following the blog:



[We're already in a post Katrina BUST. See how many Houses aren't selling? How about all those NEW apartments they can't RENT!!!](#)

Posted by: [chuck o'luck](#) on Thu Jan 10, 2008 11:10 am

A subsequent post from Wells was staggering:

"10:42 a.m. . . . An uncomfortable moment from the morning: Webb said the recession of 2001 took the wind out of Mississippi and Katrina blew it back in. An embarrassed laugh followed, but the 100 or so people in the room were mainly quiet."¹

Wells' final comments show just how minimal the benefit of today's events will be for local businesses and governments:

"1:10 p.m. . . . Things are winding down here. No real specifics came out of these forecasts, although we did hear many a caveat."

¹ According to sources, CoB administrators and faculty constituted a healthy portion of the attendance at today's events.

According to USMNEWS.NET columnist, Duane Cobb, "Webb seems to be as 'unstreetable' as anyone Gunther could have asked to participate in today's symposium, and Gunther invented the term ['unstreetable']. To state again and again how beneficial Hurricane Katrina was to the economy of Mississippi is about as disastrous as it gets."

Other sources concurred with Cobb's assessment of today's events. The general conclusion seems to be that the program probably did about as much damage to the CoB's reputation as it did to build it up. As one source put it, ". . . more and more of the outside world is starting to see just how diminished the CoB has been since 2003, if not before."