

CoB Flashback: June 28, 2004

June 28, 2004, was a significant day in the life of the CoB. On that day former Director of Development for the CoB, Frank Pickering, walked into the Forrest County Circuit Court and filed a wrongful termination of employment lawsuit against USM et al. Pickering alleged that he had been wrongfully terminated on or about October 2003, and his lawsuit mentioned former CBA and CoB deans William Gunther and Harold Doty, respectively.

"Fact 13" of Pickering's lawsuit states that Pickering ". . . reported the essence of his views to the effect that the actions taken in regard to the hiring of [former USM President] Dr. [Shelby] Thames was illegal, inappropriate, wrong, and/or a serious misdeed that needed to be corrected." This is followed by "Fact 14," which states that Pickering ". . . also reported the wrongdoing to others including but not limited to: Mr. Tim Ryan, Harold Doty, Dr. Bill Gunther and the State Auditor of the State of Mississippi[, Mr. Phil Bryant]." "Fact 15" adds that after "the foregoing had occurred, Mr. Tim Ryan, individual defendant herein, and Mr. Harold Doty made the work environment of Plaintiff so difficult, so unpleasant, and so hostile that Plaintiff had to seek medical attention." "Fact 16" adds that "[o]n one occasion Plaintiff was kept a virtual prisoner by Ryan and Doty for two and a half hours. They maintained a ruthless course of action which included threatening Plaintiff with termination, making untruthful statements to Plaintiff about his job performance, telling Plaintiff that Dr. Shelby Thames wanted Plaintiff fired, criticizing Plaintiff because of his age, embarrassing Plaintiff, ridiculing Plaintiff, yelling at Plaintiff, and intentionally inflicting emotional distress upon Plaintiff."

The behavior that Pickering alleges Doty engaged in surely rings familiar to some CoB faculty. So many current/former CoB faculty have stated that Doty made the work environment difficult, unpleasant, and hostile that the three items per day schedule that USMNEWS.NET maintains is almost too scant to tell each and every one of the stories adequately. Though Pickering's case may be one of the worst, it certainly isn't the only one. And, Doty's alleged 2.5-hour harangue of Pickering is a tactic Doty would pursue on other occasions, with CoB faculty in one unit or another. At least one of those later attempts would be cut off at the knees, when the targeted faculty member arrived at the planned haranguing with legal counsel.

Other parts of Pickering's suit also ring familiar. "Fact 18" alleges that ". . . upon Plaintiff filing a grievance regarding his situation, the Defendants adopted a course of action which deprived Plaintiff of a hearing before he was, ultimately, fired." Is Pickering alleging that USM administrators refuse to process faculty grievances? Of course he is, as so many other CoB faculty have reiterated throughout the recent months and years. Pickering's case is just one of many. There truly is no justice on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi, a fact that that leads so many USM faculty into either the Forrest County Circuit Court and/or the United States District Court (in Hattiesburg).

"Fact 19" is a whopper. There Pickering alleges that "[a]dditionally, Mr. Doty made inappropriate comments with regard to Plaintiff's wife in the presence of others." Here's the low-down. Pickering and Doty and several of the CoB's (and USM's) private supporters were at a social event one evening. Doty was reportedly speaking to a small group of private supporters when he (Doty) told them (the private supporters) that he (Doty) needed to get Pickering out of town (on fundraising business) more often so that he (Doty) might have a shot at bedding Pickering's wife. Apparently, Doty thought (thinks) Mrs. Pickering was (is) a hottie. Word of Doty's remarks reportedly got back to Pickering in short order, and Pickering made a record of them. Smart move on Pickering's part. Typical for Doty.

"Fact 20" and "Fact 21" close out Pickering's case (which is available at USMNEWS.NET): "All of the foregoing contributed to a hostile work environment. When Plaintiff requested sick leave because of how the foregoing affected him in a medical context, he was denied sick leave."

Dear readers, welcome to USM.