

Disenfranchised, or Just Plain *Dis*-sed?

by **Victoria Tyler**

At the most recent USM faculty senate meeting on 27-Jan-2012, senate president Timothy Rehner opened with the following remarks: **“We’ve got to get the rest of the senators to show up . . . We’re just over 50% I think, counting our proxies . . .”**

The remarks clearly showed Rehner’s frustration with the current level of participation among USM’s elected faculty government. To those reading these remarks here, and learning of them for the first time, they are, and should be, startling. Rehner’s frustration is with the disenfranchisement that results when certain faculty senators treat the responsibility of representing their departmental constituencies as lightly as is currently occurring on the USM campus.

Since the end of the Shelby Thames administration (2002-07), the faculty senate at USM has arguably been absent when it comes to policing the ill-advised actions of the USM administration. In fact, the early years of the Thames administration were so bad, and problematic for the USM faculty that a sort of *watchdog fatigue* developed across the campus, infecting faculty governance bodies like the faculty senate to such a degree that one could argue that the aforementioned absence likely began well before the end of the Thames regime. With the beginning of the Martha Saunders administration, USM faculty have essentially adopted an “at least she’s not Thames” attitude towards the central administration of the institution. Today, there is almost no talk of the USM plane and how much it is draining from the institution’s circulatory system, at least in the meeting rooms of the university’s faculty governance bodies. If not for the diligent work of USMNEWS.net’s administration, most of the bad behavior of the USM administration would simply go unnoticed.

Too many faculty senate presidents have washed their hands, from the beginning of their terms, of the responsibility of monitoring the central administration. Even the presidents that get off to an energetic start, such as Rehner, seem to fade by

the beginning of spring semester. Those at the most recent faculty senate meeting heard a faculty senate president reaching in every direction to positively spin VPAA Russ Willis’ departure from the Saunders administration. That was followed by support for former provost Robert Lyman’s place among the faculty – a position that will likely provide Lyman with a 9-month salary around \$175,000 – even though Lyman was caught by the IHL in the middle of a \$0.5 million misappropriation of taxpayer funds. In arguing that Lyman should be protected by tenure, Rehner simply ignores the impeachable offenses not only of Lyman and two other central administrators, but also of Saunders, the USM president who claims to not have any knowledge of the financing plan for the now-*infamous* Samsung Galaxy Tab program, nor of how one of the tablet devices was sent to IHL commissioner Hank Bounds, an act that was clearly inappropriate if not even worse.

Who knows what happens to these senators to make them become delinquent in their duties to the faculty that they represent, or what goes on with these senate presidents that seem to not be bothered by the indiscretions of the administrators they serve alongside. Near the end of fall semester 2011, Rehner sat down with Saunders for one of her notorious 5-minute video chats. Perhaps what happens to these presidents is what former CoB dean William Gunther described to the USMNEWS.net editor about 10 years ago when questioned about the merit raise process in the CoB. When asked why CoB faculty could not simply sit in on merit raise meetings held by CoB administrators – a move that would serve as a check on bad behavior – Gunther replied by pointing out that any faculty monitor who sat in on such meetings could simply be “captured” by CoB administrators, perhaps through an inappropriate raise or financial benefit. With that, Gunther denied the request for a faculty monitor. With that, Gunther also gave continued breath to those very CoB processes that caused so much discontent among CoB faculty.