

“Dr. Saunders, You are Cleared for Takeoff”

Another Look at the Expense Associated with Saunders’ Plane

I pulled [your reader's analysis](#) of USM President Martha Saunders’ decision [to lease](#) a Beechcraft King Air turbo-prop airplane in 2009, in the midst of multi-million dollar budget shortfalls facing the University, off of your website. I wanted to complete his or her brief analysis of the costs associated with that [plane](#), which was purchased by the USM Foundation and is being leased to USM, is [costing](#) Mississippi taxpayers **\$31,500 per month**, based on a 5-year lease (60 months) agreement at **\$1.89 million**.

Table 1
The Cost of Executive Travel at USM: What Is vs. What Could Be

<u>Dates of Travel</u>	<u>Journey Description</u>	<u>Planegate</u>	<u>By Car/Plane</u>
30-Mar-2009	One Way: Madison & Manassas, VA	\$ 4,500	\$277.00
30-Mar-2009	One Way: Hattiesburg & Madison	\$ 4,500	\$ 57.09
27-Mar-2009	Roundtrip: Hattiesburg & LaPlace, LA	\$ 4,500	\$150.04
21-Mar-2009	Roundtrip: Hattiesburg & LaPlace, LA	\$ 4,500	\$150.04
4-Mar-2009	One Way: Manassas & Hattiesburg	\$ 4,500	\$230.00
2-Mar-2009	One Way: Knoxville, TN & Manassas, VA	\$ 4,500	\$481.00
2-Mar-2009	One Way: Hattiesburg & Knoxville, TN	\$ 4,500	\$265.00
5-Feb-2009	Roundtrip: Hattiesburg & Jackson	\$10,500	\$ 99.55
11-Feb-2009	Roundtrip: Hattiesburg & Columbus	\$10,500	\$199.43
27-Feb-2009	Roundtrip: Hattiesburg & LaPlace, LA	<u>\$10,500</u>	<u>\$150.04</u>
		\$63,000	\$2,059.19

Notes: The “Planegate” amounts are found by dividing \$31,500 (monthly plane lease) by the number of trips taken during the month. The “By Car” amounts are found by multiplying round-trip distances (mapquest.com) by car times \$0.55 (the federal mileage reimbursement rate). The third trips to LaPlace, LA actually involved Hattiesburg and “St. John the Baptist Parish” in Louisiana. That parish’s largest city is LaPlace (50% of the Parish’s population). The flights were priced using priceline.com, with reservations in coach made one week out from the date of this analysis.

To complete the analysis I added all of the [missing trips](#) to the table (Table 1) above. Note that two months (February and March of 2009) of using the president’s plane to make just 10 trips cost taxpayers the grand total of \$63,000. Had the trips been made either by car or private air carrier, the taxpayers would have been on the hook for the small sum of \$2,059. That means that the president’s preferred mode of travel is costing MS taxpayers **\$60,941** more, or **2,959.7%** more than the most economical type of travel (car and private air carrier) would have cost. That’s a whale of an *extravagance* wrapped up in a single story. Too bad for USM.