

Lyman Disease

by Duane Cobb

To have USM provost Robert Lyman *smiling* at the prospect of hacking \$8 million out of the institution's budget, as he appeared to be in the [12-Aug-09 article](#) in *The Hattiesburg American* story entitled "USM prepares for cuts," could one day seriously harm his upward mobility in higher ed.



Robert Lyman

Since coming to USM about a year ago to head its academic programs, Lyman has presided over a hot mess. And, even though that mess is not one of his own making – it was the result of a perfect storm of bad economic times and mismanagement of taxpayers' dollars by the MS legislature – Lyman's future prospects in academia will almost surely be harmed by the mess he inherited. Having a photo showing him looking as if firing 12 tenured and tenure-track faculty was akin to hitting the jackpot at Harrah's will only make matters worse.

Since coming to USM, Lyman has been a regular at Faculty Senate meetings, explaining what it is the Martha Saunders administration is doing or wants to do. He has been fairly articulate in this role, and he seems to be liked by the senators there. However, in recent months he has been fronting for

Saunders' \$2 million Beechcraft airplane and other questionable applications of state appropriations. So, this week's focus on millions and millions of dollars of budget-cuts have been a respite from the frying pan, but not the fire.

All things considered now, Lyman's tenure as provost at USM is probably going to go down as a lesson in how *not* to get one's academic administration career started. If he wants to be a president someday, and he likely does, the odds just got longer on him, and thanks to a smile. What he's probably going to have to do now is stick it out at USM, and see things righted. That could take some time, however, and the Saunders administration is big on appearances of the here-and-now variety. She is going to need some fall guys once the initial wave of this budget crisis passes, and that could mean putting Lyman into a traditional faculty position down in the CoEP. From there getting back into administration will be difficult, if not impossible.

In many ways it's a shame that Lyman ran into such a perfect storm down in Mississippi. He was not only light years better than his predecessors Jay Grimes and Tim Hudson, he seemed to be okay against much more robust standards. Heck, compared to Martha, Lyman looks like a real gem. Only time will tell if "his day in the sun" is still possible.