

Who Watches the Watchers?

by Duane Cobb

It has been three months since the Mississippi Ethics Commission [ruled on](#) Mississippi IHL Board member Douglas Rouse's ethics inquiry. That ruling (dated 16-July-2012) said that Rouse acted improperly in having his medical practice earn revenues from health insurance premiums paid by USM, a state institution, for surgical services for its student athletes. Upon receiving that ruling, Rouse asked the Ethics Commission to reconsider. That is exactly what the Ethics Commission has apparently been up to for the *past three months*. Still no word. Only crickets, from Ethics Commission offices at least.

Rouse told news media back in the summer of 2012 that if his actions were ultimately found to be improper, he would resign his post on the IHL Board. Yet we're still waiting for that ultimate decision. Meanwhile, Rouse remains on the IHL Board, a post he has held since 2008. His actions since the initial ruling have also been quite interesting. In case you didn't notice, Rouse skipped out on the whole morning *Campus Listening Session* (to find a new president) on the Hattiesburg campus of USM last month. Yet, Robin Robinson, Ed Blakeslee, Christy Pickering, Bradford Dye, Shane Hooper, Aubrey Patterson and other Board members *were there*, and none of these lives in Hattiesburg, as Rouse does. Still, Rouse somehow managed to get down to the Long Beach campus of USM – an hour away – for the shorter, afternoon *Campus Listening Session that same day*. Imagine that.

Could it be that Rouse understood that the audience in Hattiesburg is well versed in his current ethics-related situation, and there was a good chance he could face a question or two on the matter from members of the

USM community? Was it less likely that such a question would come from the Long Beach branch of the USM family, meaning that a trip to the coast was a safer way for Rouse to fulfill his Boardly duty for that day? How about, “yes” and “yes”? Seems reasonable, doesn't it?

The original Rouse opinion was labeled 12-054-E. The Ethics Commission is now up to 12-080-E, 26 ethics rulings/opinions beyond the one that concluded that Rouse engaged in “prohibited” activities vis-à-vis USM. To the discerning eye, it would seem as though Rouse and the Ethics Commission have partnered up in a “wait ‘em out” process, from which Rouse may get to keep his position on the Board *and* have all scrutiny of his financial relationship with the USM athletics department carried out of sight-out of mind by the ocean breeze. That feeling begs the question – who monitors the ethics of the Ethics Commission?

We've gone well beyond the point when the *final ruling* on Rouse's behavior should have been entered into the books. The original finding by the Ethics Commission seems solid. Overturning it now or at some point in the future would be unwarranted. This is a chapter that should have been polished off weeks ago. USM's athletics department is currently dealing with a budget deficit in excess of \$1 million. It's time that whatever focus is being put on the sweetheart contract deals that reportedly have been going on at USM for years is freed from that oversight and put into devising ideas about how to earn some new revenue and get the organization out of its financial hole.