

Faculty Senators Slam IHL Board over Search

Robinson Faces Faculty Ire in Visit to USM Campus

As *The Hattiesburg American* higher education reporter Ed Kemp [wrote on](#) 8-Sept-2012, IHL Board member Robin Robinson visited the USM faculty senate on 7-Sept-2012 to speak about the status of the search for former USM president Martha Saunders' replacement. Robinson's visit, however, did not likely go as she planned, as faculty senators confronted her with doubts and suspicions about the legitimacy of the ongoing search. As Kemp notes, ". . . despite Robinson's assertion of the [IHL] board's seriousness in choosing a new leader, not all in attendance were buying it."

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that after the two previous searches – one that produced a new president in Shelby Thames in 2002, after Thames began as a member of the search committee, and the other that was conducted in secret and resulted in the hiring of Saunders in 2007 – the USM faculty have reason to doubt the integrity of the search process. That point was made by senator David Beckett, who told Robinson, "I can't help being cynical about this search. The [IHL] board was zero for one big-time on that, after the [USM] faculty told the board, 'Do not pick [Thames].' Then recently we had Dr. Saunders, whom we pretty much liked, and Dr. (Higher Education Commissioner Hank) Bounds, with the backing of you folks, forced her resignation. That puts you at zero for two now." According to Kemp, Beckett's stinging criticism of the IHL Board was met by Robinson with awkward humor about how the current search was above board. Still, USM faculty senators were not buying into Robinson's assurances.

In attempting to quell fears among the USM faithful, Kemp reports that Robinson told senators that "[the IHL's] goal is to find the right person to lead Southern Miss. When you think about what the [IHL] board of trustees does, this is, in my opinion, our most important duty." Saunders resigned her post in April-2012, more than four months ago. Still, the IHL has not yet named a campus search advisory committee, an early step in what the IHL has laid out as a 20-step selection process. This fact was spotlighted by faculty senator Karen Reidenbach, who told Robinson "[i]t feels like we've wasted a lot of time ... we're in a holding pattern. It feels awful, from my perspective."