

It's Easy to Like 'Senator B'

by **Victoria Tyler**

The recent USMNEWS.net *Special Report* entitled [IMPEACH](#) is one of the more eye-opening reports posted to this website in a quite a while. That report details, through the example of USM's new retention rewards program, the shoddy way in which the institution is being managed by the likes of president [Martha Saunders](#), provost [Robert Lyman](#), CFO [Russ Willis](#), and so many others. The "star" of that *Special Report* is the unnamed USM faculty senator, referred to there simply as "Senator B." In criticizing the ill-formulated retention rewards program, Senator B ran intellectual circles around Lyman, who was stuck defending the aforementioned administrative folly on behalf of Saunders.

Senator B's first jab came at the then-secretive nature of the \$100,000 retention rewards program, pointing out to Lyman that incentives are supposed to generate a desired outcome, which can't happen when contestants don't know that they are just that – *contestants*. To do Senator B's eloquence justice, let's recall what *he* said to Lyman and the other USM faculty senators who were gathered at the 5-Nov-2010 monthly meeting:

“. . . [i]f your goal is to incentivize, then let's use this money as an incentive. To make it an incentive, you have to first announce this competition in advance, so that people know they're competing for something, and that they . . .”

Of course, USMNEWS.net reporters appropriately pointed out Lyman's snooty response, which is inserted below:

“Consider *this* the announcement, then.”

This remark above was basically Lyman's only contribution to the Senator B-led discussion of the program, which was, quite frankly, a good thing since Lyman had nothing substantial to contribute. Instead, Lyman was relegated to throwing USM's institutional research administrator Michelle Arrington “under the bus,” as pointed out in the *Special Report* linked above. Senator B wasn't done, though, as his next quote (inserted below) indicates:

“. . . this money just comes 'out of the blue,' and so what you're doing is rewarding [academic] programs that happen to stumble into high levels of retention, often not because of things they did, but because of the nature of those [academic] programs – they're small [academic] programs, or they have lots of stipends attached to them, and you're not improving quality in any way, shape, or form . . . you're giving money to [academic] programs that have already succeeded in this area. . . I'm all for competition, but this is a poorly designed [rewards] program.”

With the verbal and intellectual spear above, Senator B effectively killed any defense of the new retention rewards program. Who knows what Lyman was thinking at this point? Perhaps it was that he made a mistake by coming to USM to serve as Saunders' first permanent provost. His prospects for moving up from there surely are taking hit after hit these days, and this most recent episode is simply another body blow to those prospects.

Having successfully exposed the new retention rewards program as the sham that it is, Senator B moved on to the final pillar in his verbal/intellectual monument to [the ineptness](#) of the [Saunders](#) administration:

"I guess what all of these complaints seem to have in common, no matter where you stand, is that, how is it that we're spending these large amounts of money, and in my mind kind of . . . squandering this money, because it clearly hasn't been thought out? . . . These are basic issues with the numbers . . . That is a major breakdown in the running of this university, and this is where the morale factor is here.

It's sad to think that \$100,000 is being thrown into a program that is supposed to promote retention successes, yet fails to account for a department's graduates in calculating retention rates. That the \$100,000 comes from "unallocated [university] reserves" only pours salt into the open wound created by the miscalculation. We now know, through the *Special Report* linked above, that USM has at least \$100,000 in unallocated reserves. We are to assume that [the \\$1,000 reward](#) for the capture of the three white males who allegedly chanted "Impeach Saunders!" across the USM campus also originates from the unallocated reserve account. That makes the total at least \$101,000. Then, just a few days ago, [we learned](#) that Willis plans to spend about \$3,000,000 in unallocated reserves to fund USM's new retirement incentive program. That takes us to at least \$3,101,000. How much more is there? Better yet, how can there be a budget crisis that requires terminating 29 tenured/tenure-track faculty when there is more than \$3 million (how much more we may never know!) in so-called unallocated reserves?

[Sadly](#), again, Senator B appears to be an endangered species among the USM faculty senate. It seems that faculty senators are either [speaking](#) in a pro-administration way or [failing to act](#) (or even react) to the debacle that confronts them on a daily basis. For his courage and commitment, Senator B deserves [the same outcome](#) that was *earned* by faculty at Florida State, who find themselves in a similar budget crisis. But, as the USMNEWS.net editor recently said, USM faculty will get only what they earn when it comes to dealing with this administration and the current budget crisis. Yes, Senator B threw down a gauntlet recently, but most of the other faculty senators effectively turned a blind eye and went on their way.