

It's Simple . . . Martha's Plane May Cost Jobs

*A Guest Editorial by **Victoria Tyler***

Maybe, just maybe, as a result of USM president Martha Saunders' decision to spend \$2 million in taxpayer funds to lease a Beechcraft plane, there's a pilot ([or two or three according to USM records](#)) out there who is now considering membership in the Hattiesburg Country Club. That's nice. However, there are approximately fifty USM faculty out there now, some tenured, who can blame Saunders for their terminal contracts that are the result of financial exigencies. While Saunders is looking like a joke these days due to her inept handling of the USM budget crisis, former USM president Shelby Thames is looking like quite the opposite for his decision to reduce the number of USM colleges to the five current ones – CoAL, CoB, CoEP, CoH and CoST. Now the university has only five deans (and their respective staffs) draining its budget, and not the larger number that existed prior to January of 2003.

President Saunders' plane hit USM to the tune of \$2 million, which, if spread across the five colleges, comes to \$0.4 million per college. Remember, this \$2 million does not include operating costs. In fact, during the first 17 months records produced by USM in response to an [Open Records Act request](#) report a total actual costs of [\\$591,231.71 during the first 17 months of operations](#) – which does not include the \$900,000+ balloon payment at the end of sixty months.

Looking back to 2009, the USMNEWS.net report [Shaking the Trees on USM's Budget Crisis](#) reported that the CoAL's multi-pronged response to Saunders' 2009 demand for budget cuts of \$2 million included a line-item that eliminated seven existing faculty, some of which were tenured. According to CoAL dean Denise von Herrmann, that line-item comes to about \$0.45 million, or about the same amount as the CoAL's "share" of Saunders' Beechcraft. Thus, viewed this way Martha's plane cost CoAL seven faculty – some tenured, and all of whom have families to care for/people depending on them. It's a real shame that Saunders can't connect the dots, and that almost all of the [USM Faculty Senate](#) gave Saunders a free pass (publicly at least) on the issue when it arose.

And just remember, while you are polishing up your resume and looking for a new job, Dr. Saunders' is having a great time flying about in her plane filled with politicos, high ranking administrators and their spouses, her husband, her family and members of the IHL and their spouses. Her plane is, after all, more valuable than your job.