

Lucas Spills Contract Info to Faculty Senate

Former USM President Blamed for More Problems

USM interim president Aubrey Lucas addressed the USM faculty senate on 7-Dec-2012 about the financial problems facing the institution's athletics department. According to *The Hattiesburg American's* higher education reporter Ed Kemp, [part of that discussion](#) centered on the contract that former head football coach Ellis Johnson inked with USM before the 2012 season, a season in which USM finished 0-12 and resulting in Johnson being terminated. According to Kemp's report, USM owes Johnson the remainder of his contract, or \$2.1 million, even though Johnson recently secured employment, and at \$800,000 per year, as the defensive coordinator at Auburn University. It is generally standard, when a termination occurs, to subtract a coach's current salary from what he or she is owed from a prior employer.

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Lucas: USM plans to raise Johnson buyout through private funds

University of Southern Mississippi officials aren't planning to spend any of the \$2-125 million the school will receive for its 2013 football game with the University of Nebraska on former head football coach Ellis Johnson's buyout.

As Kemp states, Lucas challenged USM's faculty senators to dig deeper into the situation in order to find out *who* authorized the unusual agreement with Johnson at the time he succeeded Larry Fedora as USM's head football coach. Speaking to the faculty senate, Lucas is quoted by Kemp as stating "[y]ou should be asking who dropped the ball in that contract. Who failed to put in that clause, which says that if you get another job you won't be paid from here?" Kemp reports that Johnson was hired on 20-Dec-2011 by former USM president Martha Saunders, and that the clause which would have allowed USM to subtract the income being paid to Johnson by AU from what he (Johnson) is owed by USM was opposed by Johnson, who was successful in preventing that clause from inclusion in the contract.

In stirring up the passions of the faculty senate, sources say that Lucas has once again pointed the finger at the failings of Saunders, who was recently hired as provost at the University of West Florida. A number of posts on USM sports message boards have linked many of the problems at USM back to Saunders, suggesting that whatever legacy the former president wanted to have vis-à-vis USM is disappearing by the day. Sources also add that Lucas' up-and-down stint as USM's interim president, which began shortly after Saunders' resignation in April-2012, will likely ultimately tarnish his overall image. His handling of this recent issue appears, to some at least, to be an attempt to salvage that image.