

Retired USM Prof Breathes Reality into Chaos at USM

PARKER EXPLAINS HOW SAUNDERS' DECISIONS WERE NOT ALL GOOD

Retired USM political science professor Joseph Parker told *The Hattiesburg American's* [higher education reporter](#) Ed Kemp that not everything that occurred during the Martha Saunders administration (2007-12) at USM was positive. Parker's USM career began in 1974, and he has seen many USM administrators come and go. According to Parker, a university president's resignation ". . . **certainly brings turmoil, creates all sense of rumors.**" That environment seems to be prevailing on USM's campuses in Hattiesburg and Long Beach in the wake of Saunders' [publicly-delivered resignation](#) on 27-Apr-2012. Parker's experience in higher education, however, prompted him to view this current situation with an appropriate degree of skepticism, and to ask some relevant questions: "**Was she pushed or did she jump? Was it the tablets? Was it the athletics? Was it the turmoil of the resignation of Lyman? We don't know. We'll probably never know.**" For Parker, even healthy skepticism can accommodate the possibility that Saunders was simply exhausted, as she contends, after five tumultuous years at the helm of the 100 year old higher education institution. As he pointed out to Kemp, "**I'm willing to take her on her word. It's been five stressful years . . . Firing professors, eliminating programs only gets the insiders excited . . . But the athletic business just stirs all kinds of hate and discontent.**"

Hauer They Doing Over in ECO?

As reported in Ed Kemp's 27-Aug-09 *THA* article linked above, English professor Stanley Hauer, a 32-year veteran of USM, said he supports the Saunders administration's decision to cut the CoB's economics programs and terminate its 9 tenured/tenure-track faculty. According to Hauer, the cuts are "necessary" in the current economic climate. Hauer is the first USM faculty member, outside of administration, to speak openly to the media in support of the administration's decision to eliminate the programs and faculty. That he comes from liberal arts is also interesting. Sources say that cracks in the support for ECO have been developing in recent days, and Hauer may simply be the first evidence of them to reach the general public.

The insert above comes from a lengthier USMNEWS.net report on the Saunders administration's attempt to deal with budget cuts in 2009-10. The full report is linked below (to [retired](#)).

Parker's injection of realism and thoughtful reflection on Saunders' time as president of USM comes, according to sources, at a time when some current USM faculty - at least [those who](#) are speaking to *THA* and other media - seem to be falling all over themselves in an attempt to sell the Saunders' administration as one that did only good things for the university. That attempt comes through even in Kemp's 29-Apr-2012 *THA* report linked above. [Stanley Hauer](#), a [retired](#) English [professor](#), told Kemp that Saunders ". . . had charisma. She had genuine vision. She had a strong support of faculty governance . . . She stepped in when the university was in near meltdown [at the end of the Shelby Thames administration in 2007]. What amazed many of us was how quickly she turned the boat around." Parker *agreed with the first part* of Hauer's statement, telling Kemp, "**I think she inherited a mess of greater proportions than most people realize.**" Still, Parker was not as willing as other USM faculty who have spoken publicly in the wake of Saunders' resignation to recount only positive aspects of her administration. Parker told Kemp that [Saunders created many of the problems that plagued her administration](#), citing her decisions to eliminate the economics department in 2009-10 and her hiring of former USM provost Robert Lyman as two prime examples. Parker characterized the former of these two actions as "**the dumbest decision of her tenure,**" while he referred to the latter of these decisions as "**a disastrous choice on her part.**"

Parker also spoke to Kemp about Saunders' decision to inform nearly 50 tenured and tenure-track faculty of their terminations, all in her attempt to handle budget difficulties in 2009 and 2010, some of which involved the aforementioned elimination of economics. Parker explained to Kemp that the process of cutting almost 50 faculty, then restoring many of them, and following all of this with across-the-board pay raises left many at USM [drained and bewildered](#). As Parker stated, "**[t]hat's a wrenching**

process that saps everybody's energy." Parker concluded his discussion with Kemp by pointing out that 2011-12 should have been the year that USM distanced itself from prior Saunders-administration scandals, yet somehow USM managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. The fall 2011 Tabletgate scandal added to this, as did several snafus in athletics over the 2011-12 academic year.