

Rodney Bennett's Extravagance

Part 3 – While we witness “TTT” of USM football...

Let's also witness costs of sports at USM. The details that USM does not volunteer. And wonder if public representations about the cost of USM sports is as inaccurate as the public representation of cost per flight hour and total cost of President Bennett's airplane.

Via a Mississippi Open Records Act request, usmnews.net recently obtained a large batch of documents from USM relating to USM president Rodney Bennett's university aircraft. This series provides analysis of these documents.

This installment examines the July 15-16, 2013 trips from Hattiesburg to Plano, Texas and back to Hattiesburg in the USM airplane made by President Rodney Bennett, Chad Driskell, Dr. Steve Moser, and Ann Marie Chilcutt. The purpose was “Athletic Director search committee visit with Beaudine & Associates and candidates.”

What was the cost of this sports related travel? And, was it worth it? Did it advance the educational mission of USM?

The round trip from Hattiesburg to Plano took 3.7 flight hours. The cost per flight hour as reported in USM's records is approximately \$6,712. (Where did this amount come from? It's simple. Just add up all the airplane costs and divide them by the number of reported flight hours.)

The total cost for this trip was:

$$\text{\$6,712 X 3.7 = \$24,834.}$$

Note that the very expensive fees to Beaudine & Associates, head hunters hired to “help” USM president find an AD, and other costs of this trip like hotel rooms, food, beverages, etc. are not included in the \$24,834.

USM administrators wildly misrepresent cost per flight hour at a fixed rate of \$800. That means USM administrators claim for the public audience that the cost for this trip is \$2960. Inaccurate for just this one trip of almost \$22,000.

And, from your armchair you can test just how inaccurate it is. Consider two simple facts. Cost per flight hour changes as a function of maintenance costs which change from period to period; cost per flight hour changes with the number of flight hours, which also changes from period to period; cost per flight hour changes as fuel usage changes which changes from period to period, etc., etc. So, a flat rate is statistically impossible unless all costs are constant from period to period. Also consider that to have a cost per flight hour of \$800 would require approximately 250 flight hours in a year AND the only cost to be considered to attain the \$800 per flight hour would be the monthly lease payment, which is approximately \$16,428. Of course the lease does not include fuel, insurance, maintenance, pilot salaries, etc., etc, which, as a matter of fact, costs considerably more than the lease payments. So, \$800 per flight hour is an intentional misrepresentation by USM

administrators to keep outsiders from properly holding them accountable for their waste of student and taxpayer money. They hope you swallow it. And, I suspect the true believers do, but the students and their parents that pay for the ever increasing tuition and fees, often borrowed money, may not be quite so sanguine.

Also, note that the cost of this flight (and many others like it), according to USM records, was not assigned to sports programs. So, just how accurate are administrators' public representations of the costs of USM sports programs, like football? Like the airplane, the costs may be one hell of a lot more than they let on. And, what has it done to advance the education of students?

Furthermore, this trip is more than likely of no value to academics for USM students. He took this trip when the money wasted could have paid a full year's tuition for three students and their families struggling to pay the increasing costs of education. Do you think these kinds of thoughts ever crossed Bennett's mind?

This flight taxpayers and students paid for is just one of many. We'll report more of them over the next few weeks. This expenditure signals the way President Bennett squanders taxpayer and student money. After all, it's not his money. So, it's easy to spend and it appears he is quite willing to waste your hard earned dollars.