

In keeping with the request of our readers, usmnews.net is re-printing some of the articles about [former President] Saunders', now President [Rodney] Bennett's airplane. The consensus of our readership is that President Bennett continues to waste our students' and taxpayers' money. As one of our readers wrote "according to the Hattiesburg American, in-state tuition will increase by 4.1% tuition beginning in Fall 2016. That translates to a 64 percent from fall 2006 to fall 2016!"

Rodney Bennett's Extravagance

Part 4 – 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 August 7, 2013 flight from Hattiesburg to Tampa, Florida and back to Hattiesburg in the USM airplane to transport the McGillis family (Bill, Will, Gabby) and Amanda Clarke. The purpose was to “Bring Athletic Director and family to Hattiesburg.”

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 Tampa took 3.9 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 as reported in USM's records and divide them by the number of reported flight hours as reported in USM's records.)

The total cost for this trip was:

$$\mathbf{\$6,712 \times 3.9 = \$26,177.}$$

Note that USM billed the USM Athletic Foundation. Think that didn't cost USM students or taxpayers anything? Wrong on at least two counts. First, its money that could support the education mission of USM and any contributions the USMF are tax deductible. That is, the rest of us fill in for lost government revenues. Second, and more important, the amount the USMF was “charged” was \$3,120, not the full cost of \$26,177! How did USM and USMF get away with this?

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 \$3,120. (See, proof in italics below that USM's cost per flight hour is unreliable, an intentional misrepresentation.)

So, students and taxpayers do indeed directly pay for this trip in the amount of \$23,057. And indirectly pay \$3,120. Add deception to waste of student and taxpayer money.

*You can test just how inaccurate \$800 per flight hour is. Consider two simple facts. Cost per flight hour changes as a function of (1) costs in the period which change from period to period and (2) the number of flight hours which also changes from period to period. So, a flat rate year after year is impossible unless all costs are constant from period to period and all the flight hours are constant from period to period. And here's the important part. In order to have a cost per flight hour of \$800 year after year, USM would also have to use the airplane at least approximately 250 flight hours per year (which USM has never gotten close to) AND the only cost incurred to attain the \$800 per flight hour would be the monthly lease payment, which is, according to USM records, approximately \$16,428. Consider a period of a year: ($\$16,428 \text{ lease payments} \times 12$) / 250 hours = \$789. The \$789 or rounded to \$800 is possible **only if** no fuel cost, no insurance costs, no maintenance costs, no pilot salaries, no hanger fees, etc are included in the costs. As a matter of fact the non-lease costs are considerably more than the lease payments!*

Quiet simply, \$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 gullible.

Also note that the cost of this flight of convenience for the Athletic Director and his family (and many others like it) 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 represent.

Furthermore, this trip of convenience for the AD and his family is more than likely of no value to the education of USM students. The money wasted on this trip of convenience 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.