

## *Rodney Bennett's Extravagance*

### Part 5 – 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 17, 19 and 21, 2013 flights. All directly related to football but charged to USM, not to USM's Athletics department or USM Athletic Foundation.

**August 17, 2013:** Hattiesburg to Tampa, Florida and back to Hattiesburg in the USM airplane. “Purpose – Pick up new Athletic Director and family for press conference announcement.” Passengers were Mr. and Mrs. Chad Driskell and Mr. and Mrs Bill McGillis and Will and Gabrielle McGillis.

The round trip from Hattiesburg to Tampa took 4.1 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:

$$\text{\$6,712 X 4.1} = \text{\$27,519}$$

**August 19, 2013:** Hattiesburg to Athens, GA and back to Hattiesburg in the USM airplane. “Purpose – Return Coach Dooley to Athens after consulting during AD search/transition.

The round trip from Hattiesburg to Athens took 3 flight hours. The cost per flight hour as reported in USM's records is approximately \$6,712.

The total cost for this trip was:

$$\text{\$6,712 X 3} = \text{\$20,136}$$

**August 21, 2013:** Hattiesburg to Tampa, Florida and back to Hattiesburg in the USM airplane. “Purpose – Return McGillis family to Tampa after AD announcement.” Passengers were Mr. and Mrs Bill McGillis and Will and Gabrielle McGillis.

The round trip from Hattiesburg to Tampa took 4.1 flight hours. The cost per flight hour as reported in USM's records is approximately \$6,712.

The total cost for this trip was:

$$\underline{\$6,712 \times 4.1 = \$27,519}$$

**Total cost of the three flights**

**\$75,174**

The cost of these sports related travels—this simple announcement of USM’s new AD—aboard USM’s airplane is **\$75,174**.

Was it worth it? Did it advance the educational mission of USM? It seems ridiculous to even ask these questions. The answer is obvious: not only no but hell no.

Students and taxpayers paid **\$75,174** to announce the new Athletic Director. This is an appalling waste of money.

Also note that the cost of this flight of convenience for the Athletic Director and his family 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 a lot more than they represent.

**Here’s the bottom line:** The money wasted on this trip of convenience could have paid a full year’s tuition for approximately **eleven students** and their families struggling to fund the increasing costs of education. Do you think these kinds of thoughts ever crossed Bennett’s mind?

These flights taxpayers and students paid for are a few 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.