

# Saunders Talks ED, USM Family Wants HC

USM president Martha Saunders stated the obvious when [she told the](#) Associated Press that Mississippi universities could help bring jobs to their host cities by getting involved in company recruitment efforts. Universities in the United States have, for decades, been in the business of assisting their host towns and cities in recruiting businesses and boosting economic activity. Saunders' predecessor, Shelby Thames, did such in a rather large way during his 2002-07 tenure as USM president. In fact, Thames' name is, according to sources, practically synonymous with the term "economic development" in and around the Hattiesburg community.

So, Saunders' recent interview with the AP will likely be seen as somewhat puzzling to members of the USM family, who are perplexed as to the lack of haste associated with USM's search for a replacement for departing head football coach Larry Fedora. With each passing day it appears as though one potential target or another is accepting a head coaching post elsewhere. Reports on 19-Dec-2011 indicated that Saunders and USM athletics director Richard Giannini may be zeroing in on current South Carolina defensive coordinator Ellis Johnson, widely recognized as one of the best defensive coaches in the nation. Those same reports also point out that Johnson is currently earning \$850,000 per year at SC, meaning that USM will likely have to eclipse the \$1 million per year mark in order to secure his services. As such, USM will, for the first time in its history, reach the seven-figure salary plateau in terms of its head coaching portfolio.