

Saunders' King Air . . . By the Numbers

Airplane Facts USM Officials Might Not Want Out in the Public

Several [analyses](#) of USM president Martha Saunders' [lease of](#), and use of, the USM airplane can be found in the [President Saunders' Extravagance](#), [Dr. Saunders' AirPlane](#), [MS Opens Records Request Reveals USM's Actual Costs of President Saunders' Plane](#), and [A Brief History of Dr. Saunders' "Lease" of Airplane](#) pages here at USMNEWS.net. A number of these analyses present copies of actual invoices showing how much USM is charging itself (i.e., USM's Airplane Operations charging Saunders' office) for various trips. Some of the charges from the more recent analyses are re-presented below in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1
Saunders' Extravagance Revealed

Date	Trip	Length	Charge	Rate
15-Sept-2010	Atlanta, GA	2.9 hrs	\$2,320	\$800
25-Sept-2010	Ruston, LA	1.8 hrs	\$1,440	\$800
25-Oct-2010	Dallas, TX	4.1 hrs	\$3,280	\$800
2-Dec-2010	Louisville, KY	4.0 hrs	\$3,200	\$800
7-Dec-2010	Louisville, KY	4.1 hrs	\$3,280	\$800
20-Dec-2010	St. Pete, FL	2.55 hrs	\$2,040	\$800
22-Dec-2010	St. Pete, FL	2.55 hrs	\$2,040	\$800

The five trips listed in TABLE 1 above are familiar. These include the 15-Sept-2010 "date night" trip to Atlanta made by Saunders and her husband, Joe Bailey. The 25-Sept-2010 trip to Ruston for the USM-Louisiana Tech football game is also there. A C-USA trip to Dallas, a SACS visit to Louisville, and a fun-in-the-sun visit to St. Petersburg for the Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl are also part of TABLE 1. In each case, the stated charge is divided by the stated flight hours to determine the hourly rate that Airplane Operations is charging Saunders' office for use of the plane. On each occasion, that charge comes to \$800 per hour, which is the exact amount that USM provost Robert Lyman [reported to the USM faculty senate](#) back in 2008 when the episode began.

Given that we know [the annual lease payment on the plane](#) is about \$200,000, Saunders would need to use the plane about 250 hours each year for the chosen \$800/hour rate to generate the \$200,000 total established by the lease. On a monthly basis, use would need to total 20.8 hours in order to justify the \$800/hour rate. Examine the Dec-2010 air time listed in TABLE 1 above. The TABLE 1 total for Dec-2010 is 13.2 hours, or only about 63% of the required total of 20.8 hours per month. What's remarkable is that getting to 13.2 hours meant that Saunders' pilots had to make *two round trips* between Hattiesburg and Louisville to get her to and from a SACS meeting that took place there. That nonsensical use of the plane added four hours to the monthly total that *should not* have ever existed, at least according to sources. Assuming that the plane is in the air only 63% of the required time of 250 hours each year, the *actual* hourly cost of flights aboard

USM Air comes to about \$1,270. This figure is about 59% higher than the \$800 figure that Lyman provided to the USM faculty senate back in 2008.

Finally, when [Saunders got snarky with a USM student](#) for questioning the sparse use of the plane, she chastised the student, and suggested that he “check [his] references” before sticking with such an assertion. Given the demand to reach about 4.8 hours of flight each week to account for the 250 hours necessary to justify the \$800/hour rate, Saunders would have to make the equivalent of one trip to Atlanta and one trip to Ruston *each week*, at least using the lower end [suggestion made by her](#) during the town hall meeting that the plane was in the air twice per week. At three trips per week, Saunders would need to make something like three trips to Ruston on a weekly basis. Given what we know from the USMNEWS.net pages linked to the top of this report, it doesn't appear as though Saunders is flying enough *overall*, or flying to enough *locales outside of Mississippi*, to justify the \$800 per hour charge.