

President Saunders Continues to Squander Student and Taxpayer Money on Her Airplane

PART 5

www.usmnews.net recently received another set of documents related to President Saunders' airplane, N777AQ, through Mississippi Open Records Act (MORA) requests. MORA documents, USM's own records, provide verification of misrepresentations made by President Saunders and Provost Lyman about N777AQ.

We now have two years of **actual** costs of N777AQ. Although the airplane is owned by the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation, all costs are paid by University of Southern Mississippi. That is, taxpayers and USM students pay all costs of President Saunders' airplane.

See [PART 1](#) to access documents acquired through MORA requests. With these records, you can verify **actual** costs of N777AQ. As reported in **PART 1**, **actual** cost per flight hour is **\$5,971.11**. (Please note that when the **\$907,053.85 balloon payment**, which is due at the end of the five year lease, is amortized over the five years of the purchase/lease, the cost per flight hour is **\$8,910.28**. Including the balloon payment, this trip cost **\$36,532.15**.)

The fifth report in this series follows:

October 25, 2010

Pilots Allen and Price flew N777AQ round trip to Dallas, TX. According to USM's "Interdepartmental Invoice" the passenger was Dr. Saunders. USM pilots' "King Air N777AQ Trip Log" also reports Dr. Saunders is the only passenger.

Actual flight hours were 4.1. Applying Saunders' inaccurate **estimate** of \$800 per flight hour, USM charged \$3,280 to the President's Office. As shown in her own actual detailed cost records, President Saunders is either incompetent or disingenuous to represent that cost per flight hour is \$800 and this flight as costing \$3,280. The **actual cost** to Mississippi taxpayers and USM students to fly N777AQ was 4.1 **actual** flight hours times **\$5,971.11 actual cost** per flight hour is **\$24,481.55**.

The purpose of the flight as reported in USM's "Interdepartmental Invoice" was to "Attend C-USA Board Meeting in Dallas Traveling from New Orleans to Dallas with the need to get back to Hattiesburg for the National Merit Student Reception at the President's Home. No commercial flight was workable for this trip."

This is a more lengthy statement of purpose than usually offered in a USM

“Interdepartmental Invoice”. An excuse that “No commercial flight was workable for this trip” makes no sense. Saunders made it quite clear when she spent taxpayer and student money on this plane that it was to avoid the inconvenience of commercial flights. Come to think of it, only a princess thinks in such terms, not a responsible president of a university. So, President Saunders is left with planning, or the lack of it, resulting in an outrageous cost of **\$24,481.55** for this flight.

An unanswered question that should be answered: USM officials represented that their estimated cost of \$800 per flight hour might be slightly more expensive than commercial rates. They have not corrected this material misinformation. The difference between the minimum actual cost per flight hour of **\$5,971.11** and the estimated cost per flight hour of \$800 is material by any measure. A question to consider is, when does incompetence become fraud?

The question is well worth asking again: When does incompetence become fraud?