

QUESTION: **WHOSE PLANE IS THIS?**

We usually ask what it cost to fly Saunders's airplane N777AQ—bought and paid for by taxpayers and students—to a particular destination. Perspective should change based on additional information and it does here, too. We insisted that USM obey the Mississippi Open Records law and USM provided information an honest institution would have provided with the initial Mississippi Open Records Act (MORA) request. The additional documentation changed the nature of our usual question. This is true for many flights of N777AQ. Why? It's simple. The plane is often used by IHL and is being paid for by USM students and indirectly by USM faculty. If the IHL wanted the plane, it should pay for it. Not USM students and faculty. This report and others to follow will provide evidence for this conclusion.

If you are a new reader of this series, catch up by reviewing [A Brief History of Saunders' "Lease" of airplane N777AQ During a Recession, Part 1](#). That report provides background information concerning the actual costs for the first 17 months of an airplane N777AQ leased by President Saunders for a 60-month period. For example, USM documents report total actual cost of **\$591,231.71** during the first 17 months of airplane N777AQ operations.

Interdepartmental Invoices for 30 flights were provided in an initial response from USM to a MORA request concerning the airplane President Saunders leases and pays for with Mississippi taxpayer and student dollars. Although the MORA request was for all records related to the plane, USM's response was incomplete. When legal counsel followed up concerning the inadequate response, the University produced more documents. [usmnews.net](#) reporters are currently reviewing the additional documents and there are reasons to believe the response was again incomplete. The following is an example.

To West Point/Golden Triangle for IHL and Non-USM Personnel Only

We now have the pilot's log, which USM legal counsel provided after we noted the original request was incomplete. On September 4, 2009, a USM Pilot Trip Log represents that airplane N777AQ flew to "Golden Triangle, MS **with no passengers**. The pilot's log—two pilots, by the way: Messrs Kilgore and Price—reports that passengers are transported from the Golden Triangle, MS to Hattiesburg, MS. The passengers are Doug Rouse, IHL member, and his wife, Pam Rouse, Christy Pickering, IHL member, and her

spouse, Brent Pickering, Robin Robinson, IHL member, Ed Blakeslee, IHL member, and George and Elizabeth Ross (former president of Alcorn State and his spouse). Neither Dr. Saunders nor any other USM employee was identified as a passenger. However, the Interdepartmental Invoice charges the trip to the "President's Office"—that's paid for by USM students and faculty. Also note that **no purpose** was stated for the trip. IHL personnel used the plane, common for flights of N777AQ, **and the charge was to the "President's [Saunders'] Office", not the IHL.**

The number of flight hours reported were 1.3. Therefore, the cost to students, faculty, and taxpayers was $1.3 \times \$6,187.67 = \$8,043.97$.

(Remember, usmnews.net's computation of cost does not include or amortize the \$907,053.85 balloon payment due on the 60th month. If that amount is included, the cost is substantially higher than \$6,187.67 per flight hour.)

WHO'S MONITORING THESE "PUBLIC SERVANTS"?

The incomplete response to our MORA request signals irresponsible accountability and questionable use of taxpayer, student, and faculty resources.

Is anyone holding USM and IHL administrators accountable? IHL members blessed the lease/purchase of the plane. IHL members are enjoying the use of the plane **at no cost**. So, do not expect the IHL to do its oversight responsibility and hold President Saunders accountable for this extravagant expenditure of student and faculty resources. Remember what happened to [IHL Commissioner Meredith](#)? It may be instructive to review a news report of former Commissioner Meredith's and MSUs former interim president Watson's misconduct.

Stay tuned to usmnews.net for cost analyses of the remaining flights aboard President Saunders' plane.