

QUESTION:
WHAT SHOULD A TRIP FROM HATTIESBURG, MS
TO BIRMINGHAM, AL COST?

For those of you commencing your readership of the series with this report, you may wish to read the introductory materials in the initial report [What Does A Trip From Hattiesburg, MS, To Gulfport, MS Cost?](#) That report provides background information concerning the actual costs for the past 17 months of an airplane N777AQ leased by President Saunders for 60 months.

USM has identified a total actual cost of \$591,231.71 for 30 round trips during the past 17 months of operations. Based on USM's numbers, the actual cost per round trip is \$19,707.72 (total actual costs divided by number of trips). Alternatively, USM reports a total of 114 passengers over the 17 month period. The cost per passenger round trip flight would be \$5,186.24 (total actual cost divided by the number of passengers).

To Birmingham, AL And Back

On June 21, 2010, President Saunders flew round trip from Hattiesburg, MS, to Birmingham, Alabama on airplane N777AQ. She is the only passenger listed on the Interdepartmental Invoice which also shows the flight charged to the "President's Office." The flight time was 1.8 hours. The stated purpose was to attend a SACS meeting. While we question the need to incur the costs of leasing an airplane (\$591,231.71 in the first seventeen months) to travel from Hattiesburg, MS to such locations as Gulfport, MS, West Point, MS and Birmingham Alabama, that discussion is beyond the scope of this report.

See, Interdepartmental Invoice inserted below:

Given the actual costs provided for President Saunders' plane, you can view the cost from a couple of perspectives.

At an average cost per flight, the trip cost **\$19,707.72**, i.e., \$591,231.71 actual total cost/30 actual trips over the 17 month period.

At a cost per passenger trip flight, the trip was **\$5,186.24**, i.e., (\$591,231.71 actual total cost/114 passengers = \$5,186.24 per passenger)

How did USM arrive at \$1,440.00 for the flight? We are provided no guidance. Therefore, we use actual costs collected by USM over an extended period of 17 months. Whatever costs USM is using to calculate the \$1,440.00 number, they are not using actual costs. [If USM is using a budgeted usage rate, it is a wildly inaccurate estimation of the actual costs.] We challenge USM to explain in detail why its cost allocation is accurate. Dr. Saunders will need to begin with the actual costs contained in University records.

We all know that costs of higher education are skyrocketing. Is anyone in authority holding administrators accountable? IHL members blessed the purchase of the plane. IHL members are enjoying the use of the plane (see past and future reports in this series.) So, do not expect the IHL to hold President Saunders accountable for this extravagant expenditure of taxpayer and student money. A corollary is to expect costs of higher education to continue to unnecessarily increase.

Stay tuned to usmnews.net for cost analyses of the remaining 27 flights aboard President Saunders' plane.