

Time To Review Facts About President Saunders' Airplane You Paid For

Administrators and Politicians Teach Us To Distrust Them

It may sound a bit out of the ordinary at first, but administrators and politicians teach us to distrust them. More than likely they don't want to encourage us to distrust them, but their words and behavior do just that. And odd as it may sound the distrust is not without advantage in our, faculty, students, and taxpayers' education.

The distrust administrators engender is not just obscure, distant politicians who say one thing and do another. No, the "educators of distrust" are right here at home, at USM. Here's how the education occurs: compare words administrators voluntarily offered as public information reported through *The Student Printz* with documentation reluctantly provided by the same administrators through a Mississippi Open Records request. First, presented below in quotes is voluntary information provided by President Saunders that "addresses concerns" about USM's airplane. Then reports are provided which reveal the actual uses of USM's airplane.

"Concern [expressed at a public forum]: USM's plane is unnecessarily burning student tuition money.

Response: The university leases a twin engine prop airplane owned by the University Foundation. Saunders said the chief pilot is already employed by the school, and the plane is available only for official use. USM is not the only university to have a plane. Other Mississippi universities, such as Mississippi State and Ole Miss, each have one or more than one plane to maximize the time of people doing business for the university, Saunders said." (*The Student Printz*, "President Saunders Addresses Concerns: Part 2", September 15, 2010.)

Consider the following five reports that recount actual use of the airplane whose cost could easily have been avoided if the Saunders administration had been thinking about students and faculty instead of their personal pleasure. Keep in mind that even though the Foundation owns the plane, it owns it in name only. USM students, faculty, and taxpayers pay every cent incurred for the plane. (See, the [contract](#) between USM and USM Foundation obtained through the Mississippi Open Records Law)

Furthermore, [there are eight pilots who fly the plane](#). Eight and they are on the USM payroll.

One more note before we start. Just because your neighbor drives a Mercedes doesn't mean that a wise decision for you is to buy one, too, with money your family needs for food, shelter, and clothing. Specifically, President Saunders "leased" this plane while terminating faculty and staff because of budget shortfalls.

Let's now see what "official use" and "doing business for the university" really mean.

Report 1: On November 22-23, 2009, USM's records show that it's multi-million dollar airplane N777AQ flew to Minneapolis, MN with a stop in Oxford, MS. Passengers: Martha [Dunagin] Saunders, Joe Bailey—Saunders' spouse, Joel Dunagin and Jennifer Dunagin and Eric Lowery and Bob Pierce. usmnews.net reports that Joel Dunagin is the owner of Dunagin Pest Control and Saunders' cousin, and Jennifer Dunagin is Joel Dunagin's daughter. Mr. Dunagin was Congressman Taylor's campaign spokesman and Jennifer Dunagin, a recent graduate of Ole Miss, was a scheduler for Congressman Taylor. It must have seemed like a family reunion on the flight: Martha, her husband, her cousin and her cousin's child. USM records charged the flight to the "President's Office"—that is, USM students, faculty, and Mississippi taxpayers paid. No purpose was given for the trip. Flight time was 7 hours at \$6,187.67 per flight hour means cost of the flight was **\$43,313.69.**(As noted in [numerous reports](#), **computation of cost per flight hour 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.**)

Report 2: On November 28, 2009, USM's records report that Dr. Saunders, Joe Bailey—Saunders' spouse, Chad Driskell, Executive Assistant to the President, Doug Rouse--IHL member, Pam Rouse—Doug Rouse's wife, and Davis and Be Morgan flew N777AQ to Greenville, NC. The President's Office was charged for the trip—that is, USM students, faculty, and Mississippi taxpayers paid for the flight. No purpose was given for the trip. However, a quick review of [USM sports records](#) shows that the Golden Eagles football team played East Carolina on November 28, 2009. Given the actual cost per flight hour of \$6,187.67 and the reported 5.75 flight hours to

Greenville, NC, the cost of this junket to students, faculty, and taxpayers was **\$35,579.10**.

Report 3: On June 14 and 16, 2009, USM's records show that Dr. Saunders flew USM high level administrators, IHL Board members, and state and local politicians in N777AQ to Omaha, NE to watch the College World Series. The passengers: Joe Bailey—Saunders' husband, Chad Driskell—Executive Assistant to the President, Jack Driskell, Joe and Connie Morgan, Bob Pierce, Johnny Atherton, Doug Rouse—IHL member, Billy Hewes—Mississippi state senator, Jay McDowell, Richard Giannini, John Brown, and Johnny Dupree—Hattiesburg mayor. USM's records report President's Office was charged for the flight—that is, USM students, faculty, and Mississippi taxpayers paid. The flight time of 11.7 hours and \$6,187.67 per flight hour means an actual cost of **\$72,395.74**. **\$72,395.74** was spent so that President Saunders could chauffeur her husband, politicians, IHL members, upper administrators, and spouses to a BASEBALL GAME.

Report 4: USM's records show that on June 6-7, 2009, President Saunders flew high USM administrators and their spouses and IHL members and their spouses aboard N777AQ to Gainesville, FL to watch the SUPER REGIONAL BASEBALL GAME. The passengers included Joe Bailey—Saunders' spouse, Richard Giannini and Gayle—Giannini's spouse, Doug Rouse—IHL member and Rouse's spouse Pam, and Dianne Stark. It took 3.3 flight hours at \$6,187.67 per flight hour for an actual cost of **\$20,419.31**. Keep in mind, IHL members are supposed to monitor and correct misuse and mismanagement of taxpayer and student resources entrusted to administrators like President Saunders.

Report 5: Let's pause and take stock. We've reviewed four trips of USM's airplane, N777AQ, three to BASEBALL and FOOTBALL games and one mysterious "family" trip. The total cost is **\$171,707.84**. The \$171,707.84 does not include costs of hotel rooms, food, beverages, transportation to/from the airport, tickets, etc. The detailed information provided in the four Reports above and many others contained on usmnews.net were obtained through a persistent application of the Mississippi Open Record Act. The \$171,707.84 is a small portion of what the plane has already cost USM students, faculty, and taxpayers. Regardless, what is \$171,707.84 to President Saunders? Well, it's not her money. What is \$171,707.84 to students? To faculty? To taxpayers? The plane "leased" by President Saunders amidst a recession and termination of faculty is scheduled to cost

millions—more than half a million already incurred and there is still a **\$907,053.85 balloon payment** yet to be paid. See details at www.usmnews.net.

USM's documents report the truth that the plane is used for entertainment of USM administrators and their spouses, IHL members and their spouses, and politicians. Nevertheless, that administrators educate us to distrust them is not a signal to become cynics—sneering fault-finders. Instead, consider administrators' claims, like President Saunders', as requiring skepticism—healthy doubt about glittering generalities like the “plane [is used] to maximize the time of people doing business for the university.” A healthy skepticism is to insist on details, documentation, and evidence. And try this view as a principle of civics: administrators educating us to distrust them may have a positive influence if we are encouraged to have a healthy skepticism of those who are charged with wisely employing our resources.

In conclusion, administrators need to focus on what is good for students, faculty, and taxpayers, not what's good for their personal pleasure. If they choose to waste student, faculty, and taxpayer money, we should remove them from office.

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