

See Saunders Equivocate

To hear USM president Martha Saunders tell it, the parking fee increase facing USM students in 2009-10 – the one that *The Hattiesburg American* reported on in late June-09 – is not even a done deal yet, even though it really is. What are we referencing here? Saunders' recent (and latest) "Dear Faculty and Staff" communiqué, inserted below, wherein she states (in the very first paragraph) "we have put off making final decisions".

Dear Faculty and Staff,

I apologize for the great delay in communicating with you regarding proposed increases in parking fees. We have put off making final decisions until the uncertainty surrounding the FY10 budget was resolved. Unfortunately, we still only have a murky picture of what the year will hold for us, so we soldier on, operating on the best information we have.

First, I want you to know that parking fees for employees will not be raised this year. That's the good news. They will, however, be raised next year. The reason for this necessary hike is the cost of the construction of a parking garage on campus that will add 1,200 parking spaces. The need for additional parking on our comparatively small campus is increasing as enrollment grows and cultural and athletic events attract even larger crowds. Two such facilities were approved in 2007 as part of the Hattiesburg campus master plan.

For faculty and staff, the increase will be based on the employee's salary. For those employees making less than \$24,000, the annual parking fee will be \$81 beginning in Fall 2010. For those employees making more than \$24,000, the new annual parking decal fee will be \$135.

In order to lessen the impact to employees, this annual parking fee may be payroll deducted over a nine-month period, from September through May of each year. The fee will be considered a pre-tax deduction.

Although we may all have different opinions as to the timing of this project, I strongly believe this decision will improve the quality of life on our campus. Thank you for your cooperation in helping the University meet this critical need.

Sincerely yours,

Martha Saunders
President

According to Saunders, the parking fee increase – from \$50 to \$135 – that is already facing students in 2009-10 will be delayed one year (until 2010-11) for faculty and staff. And even then the fee increase will be a "pre-tax deduction" that phases in based on income level, starting with a fee of \$81 for those earning up to \$24,000/year and going to \$135 for those earning above \$24,000. Essentially, almost all faculty will soon pay \$135 for parking, while a majority of USM staffers will face a parking bill of \$81. Both of these represent significant increases, ranging from a whopping 62% to an almost unfathomable 170%. With yet another not so good situation facing "the USM family", sources tell USMNEWS.net that Saunders' penchant for dodging the fallout is wearing thinner and thinner among faculty and staff.