

Special Report

Phone Records Reveal Influence

Records of Rouse's Communications with Saunders Made Public

Ed Kemp's 12-Aug-2012 [report for](#) *The Hattiesburg American* reveals what appears to be an attempt by IHL Board member Doug Rouse to influence the 2011-12 hiring of a new athletics director at USM. Kemp reports that text messages sent by Rouse to then-USM president Martha Saunders – messages that were obtained by *THA* via Mississippi Open Records law, show what appears to be an attempt by Rouse to influence the process of replacing outgoing USMAD Richard Giannini. A couple of the texts sent by Rouse to Saunders that were discovered by Kemp are inserted below:

"How are we looking for a decision on AD by tomorrow?"

"Would love to talk about search whenever you have a chance."

Another, dated 15-April-2012 according to Kemp, states:

"Sorry we couldn't connect, but wanted you to know Evan Dillard, Lawrence Warren, Mickey Hudson, Ed Langton and Carl Nicholson called today stating they are against in-house hire for AD position (Hammond). These are not Richard [Giannini, former athletic director] supporters but people who support the Univ. as a whole, and I hope you will talk to them before hiring."

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that the text message string above does seem to indicate that Rouse sought to influence the hiring of Giannini's replacement. In fact, sources also remind us that Saunders resigned her position as USM president at about the same time that the longer text inserted above was sent to her by Rouse.

When contacted by Kemp and/or *THA*, neither Dillard nor Nicholson were willing to comment on the matter. Kemp reports that neither Warren nor Hudson could be reached by *THA* for comment on the issue. Lastly, Kemp adds that when contacted by *THA*, Langton would not confirm or deny the sentiment in the longer text above, adding that the issue is much more complex than a conversation with a newspaper reporter (for a news report) would adequately convey. When asked by Kemp about the situation, Rouse responded with "[Saunders'] decisions are her decisions. I know that and I knew that then, but if I have a lot of people at the university calling me and complaining, I'm going to share that with her every time." The problem with this explanation, at least according to USMNEWS.net sources, is that the individuals mentioned in Rouse's text to Saunders on 15-April-2012 – Dillard, Warren, Hudson, Langton and Nicholson – are not "people at the university," as referred to by Rouse above. These are local business people (owners), some of whom have had an economic interest in USM in the past.

Stay tuned for more on this story in the coming days.