

Special Report

Some Faculty React Bizarrely to Saunders' Sudden Resignation . . . Maybe

A number of USMNEWS.net followers have recognized that comments on Martha Saunders' sudden resignation as USM president on 27-Apr-2012 seem bizarre, and that the behavior of faculty senate president Timothy Rehner leads the way in that charge. Rehner attended the morning press conference held by Saunders, IHL commissioner Hank Bounds, and IHL Board president Ed Blakeslee. During the Q&A portion, after only a couple of questions were asked by media outlets in attendance, Rehner injected himself into the Q&A, first by commenting on his despair at Saunders' surprising resignation, and second by asking Bounds what level of effort he or others put into convincing Saunders to remain.

Much of Rehner's sentiment from that presser [comes through in his](#) 27-Apr-2012 interview with *The Hattiesburg American*. When asked to comment on whether he thought Saunders' decision to resign was indeed her own, Rehner stated, "I want to believe her. It's just that's the way most people handle these kinds of things." Clearly, Rehner believes that Saunders was forced out as president. At the morning press conference, Rehner went further, stating "I am extremely disappointed, and I'm angry that this has come out like this. I don't know the reasons, but it's not the right time for this to happen. I'm not sure what's going on, but I think it's a bad time for the university." Meanwhile, College of Health dean Michael Forster echoed some of Rehner's reaction. Forster told *THA*, also on 27-Apr-2012, "We're all sitting here just stunned. The biggest challenge facing the university is maintaining stable and forward-thinking leadership."

Readers wonder how such anger and shock could exist among USM faculty given the many scandals that have occurred under Saunders' leadership at USM - leadership that current interim USM athletics director Jeff Hammond strangely likens to that of General David Patraeus, the current Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. This list includes, but is not limited to, (1) the Tabletgate [controversy](#), (2) recent [charges of harassment](#) of two female athletics administrators [at the hands](#) of Hammond, (3) a national [blackface scandal](#) involving [a USM sorority](#), (4) a [national scandal](#) involving [racist chants by the USM pep band](#) during the 2012 NCAA Tournament, (5) [the decision to fire](#) almost [50](#) tenured [and](#) tenure- [track](#) faculty [to address](#) budget [cuts](#) in [2009](#) and [2010](#), (6) [suspending](#), without real [due process](#), multiple USM [faculty](#) for being potentially [dangerous](#), (7) an [off-campus shooting](#) that [wounded](#) three USM football players, [a story](#) that also went national, (8) the classification of [a campus chalking incident](#), where [remarks](#) critical [of](#) Saunders were [chalked](#) around [campus](#), as a [crime](#), (9) the [use of \\$325,000](#) of USM funds to renovate [the master bedroom suite](#) of the president's mansion, (10) the signing of a \$2 million lease of [a Beechcraft airplane](#) during the worst economic [recession since](#) the Great Depression, (11) a [campus beating](#) that left [one USM student](#) seriously injured, (12) [a sorority incident](#) that [that left](#) two USM co-

eds/[sorority](#) members [hospitalized](#) from alcohol [poisoning](#), and many others. How could Rehner and Forster overlook these scandals, particularly ones related to firing of tenured and tenure-track faculty to address budget shortfalls during the recession that began in 2008? No other public university in Mississippi dealt with the economic distress by terminating tenured and/or tenure-track faculty. Of course, as sources indicate, other scandals, particularly the plane lease, relate to this situation.

USMNEWS.net sources remind us, however, of various [reports](#) and [editorials](#) here [at](#) USMNEWS.net [that](#) suggest that both Rehner and Forster are both “in the tank” for Saunders, and are thus willing [to ignore](#) all of the scandals surrounding her administration since 2002, many of which are not listed above. It’s possible, sources add, that these two have a lot [to lose](#) in a post-Saunders USM. As such, sources close by stating that their (Rehner’s and Forster’s) 27-Apr-2012 comments vis-à-vis Saunders’ sudden resignation may not be so bizarre after all.