

Special Report

Tar Balls

USM Relying on Controversial Sources of Money

At the 8-Sept-2011 Fall 2011 Convocation, USM president Martha Saunders boasted about a couple of new grant successes. One of these is a \$2.2 million grant received by USM to study the effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Saunders also noted that another \$6 million is forthcoming from *British Petroleum (BP)* of all places, again to study aspects of the recent oil spill off the southern coast of the United States (Saunders talked about how USM scientists will be working on a new dispersant for use in handling future oil spills).

The second grant highlighted by Saunders will be awarded to the College of Health. This government grant involves research on certain aspects of the new healthcare exchange, otherwise known as "Obamacare," that is going into effect in the near future. Of course, most citizens of Mississippi are against this forthcoming program, and various high-ranking officials in the state have taken a public position against it. Thus, Saunders is highlighting funding for work on a program that is controversial in its home state (i.e., the Obamacare research), as well as \$6 million in funding from BP, the corporation many Americans blame for causing the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

Will USM lose its independence, and perhaps its integrity, in accepting the BP grant? Will Mississippi officials be pleased that USM faculty will be assisting in the implementation of Obamacare? These are questions Saunders has apparently let slide at the moment, as USM appears to chase dollars from whatever sources are willing to provide it. Whether or not various faculty and/or student constituencies on campus take opposing stances to these projects remains to be seen.