

Special Report

Where was Superman?

During her 2011 fall [convocation speech](#), USM president Martha Saunders “called out” those who she believed were [sowing seeds of doubt and distrust](#) on the USM campus. As [part of her address](#), she informed the gathered crowd that her administration would be successful, in part, because no matter who won the upcoming 2011 gubernatorial race between Johnny Dupree (Dem.) and Phil Bryant (Rep.), Mississippi’s new governor would be a USM alumnus. The 2011 election resulted in a win for Bryant, and, what Saunders hoped, was also a win for USM.



Mississippi’s gubernatorial candidates, Johnny Dupree (Dem.), left, and Phil Bryant (Rep.), right, square off during the election period in 2011.



Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant (Rep.)

One can understand Saunders’ thinking about the 2011 gubernatorial election in Mississippi. Over the many years leading up to the 2011 election, both Bryant and Dupree had been fixtures on the USM campus, as the photo montage below attests.



Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny Dupree visits with USM administrators, both on and off the USM campus, over the years.



Phil Bryant visits the USM campus on numerous occasions over the years.

Having served multiple terms as Hattiesburg mayor, Dupree had the proximity advantage, and he used it to attend events such as Founders' Day each spring. Bryant, who sources believe was Saunders' preferred candidate in the 2011 election, also visited the USM campus on a variety of occasions. One of his more well-known visits came prior to Saunders becoming president, when Bryant served as commencement speaker and put forth the message that graduates should emulate heroes, such as Superman.



Phil Bryant speaks about heroes like Superman at USM commencement in 2003.



Outgoing USM president Martha Saunders fields reporters' questions at her resignation announcement on 27-April-2012. At left is Hank Bounds, at right is Ed Blakeslee.

The question some are asking now concerns how Bryant felt about Saunders' [sudden decision to](#) "resign" a few days ago, on 27-April-2012. Bryant was noticeably absent at Saunders' press conference, which was attended by only Hank Bounds, the Mississippi IHL commissioner who [some believe](#) will succeed Saunders as president of USM, and Ed Blakeslee, the president of the IHL Board. Bryant's absence is further proof, to sources at least, that the machinery of government in Mississippi was, and is, fully

supportive of Saunders' departure from the USM president's office. Sources add that all that may remain now is to await the fallout from the ongoing scandal investigations to see just how bad things are on the Hattiesburg campus.