

*In anticipation of usmnews.net's current Mississippi Open Records request which will update USM's and President Bennett's use of an airplane, N777AQ, usmnews.net offers a history of Bennett's use of this expensive administrator's toy, first leased by past-President Martha Saunders and paid for on an ongoing basis with student and taxpayer money.*

## **Here We Go, Again.**

### **USM Is Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ, Part 11**

Yesterday, Part 10 reported that on February 4, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid a small fortune to fly the IHL designated "preferred candidate" Rodney Bennett to Hattiesburg for a "campus visit." By February 4, 2013, Bennett knew he would be the next Southern Miss president. On February 1, 2013, a news story [reported](#):

College Board officials said Friday that they want Rodney Bennett, the University of Georgia's vice president of student affairs, to become the next president of 16,000-student USM.

USM's records reported that the number of flight hours to taxi Bennett from Athens, GA to USM was 4.5. That translates a cost to students and taxpayers in the amount of **\$31,235**. That's approximately \$31,000 more than the cost of a commercial ticket. Also, keep in mind, I'm not including the costs of automobile transportation to/from the airports, food, lodging, etc. Just the plane ride: **\$31,235!**



Rodney Bennett, President, University of Southern Mississippi

If that weren't enough waste to transport Bennett back and forth from Athens, GA to Mississippi, standby for really bad news. Just a couple of days later, they did it, again. Future stories will report that they will do it yet again and again, all within a several days. So, let's take a look at the flight boondoggle of this report.

#### **First, let's remind readers that this is a continuing series**

On March 11, 2013, we returned to reports about USM's airplane because usmnews.net recently acquired through a Mississippi Open Records Act request another set of information about N777AQ. As a matter of fact, with regard to the [current series](#), reporting the use and actual cost

of airplane N777AQ, USM administrators have continued to [materially misrepresent](#) information about the cost of N777AQ.

Several years ago, we began reporting details of USM's costs as reflected in its internal records to expose the true cost of then-president Martha Saunders' extravagant use of student and taxpayer money to purchase an airplane, N777AQ, while, by the way, she was firing dozens of faculty because of a cutback in state financial support.

The updated actual cash cost per flight hour is \$4,840. If the nearly one million-dollar balloon payment is included, the total actual cost per flight hour is **\$6,941**. Think of the \$800 misrepresentation this way: If someone sold you a car for \$20,000 then handed you a bill for \$173,525, what would you call her?

On February 6, 2013, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid a small fortune to fly Temple Bennett, the IHL designated "preferred candidate" Rodney Bennett's wife to Hattiesburg from Athens, GA. Kristina Pierce, Compliance Coordinator, Athletic Compliance, J. Payne, and C.D. Smith, IHL member were aboard the flight.

The number of flight hours was 3.2. That translates a cost to students and taxpayers in the amount of **\$22,211**. That's approximately \$22,000 more than the cost of a commercial ticket. Also, keep in mind, I'm not including the costs of automobile transportation to/from the airports, food, lodging, etc. Just the plane ride: **\$22,211!**

Temple Bennett was reported as "screaming in excitement over a cellphone" at the news of her husband being selected at USM's president. If that is true, she wouldn't have minded flying commercial and saving students and Mississippi taxpayers approximately \$22,000.

Unfortunately, Rodney and Temple Bennett have started their positions in an extravagant and wasteful manner. They had choices; they could have traveled first class, even, and saved tens of thousands of dollars. Alas, they have shown their inclination to waste student and taxpayer money. Already.

*To date, although the IHL visits usmnews.net regularly and only on weekdays during work-hours, never has anyone from the IHL or USM provided any corrections to our news reports despite the fact that we encourage input or corrections to our reports from all our readers. Of course, USM and the IHL have the same records and documents that they provide us in our Mississippi Open Records requests.*