

Here We Go, Again. And Again

USM Is Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ, Part 12

In Part 10, we 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.

http://blog.gulflive.com/mississippi-press-news/2013/02/rodney_bennett_preferred_candi.html

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!**

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 days later, they do it, again. And again.

In Part 11, we reported that 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. 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. The folks who should be screaming are the taxpayers and USM students. Screaming mad, that is.

Let’s keep a running total of these flights using USM’s airplane, N777AQ: **\$53,446!** That’s for just two flights taxiing the Bennetts from Athens. The really bad news is that the Bennetts’ extravagance has just begun.

A little background, first, then we’ll get to today’s waste of taxpayers’ and students’ resources.

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 another small fortune to fly USM "president" Rodney Bennett from Hattiesburg to Athens, GA, then to Oxford, MS. The number of flight hours was 2.8. That translates a cost to students and taxpayers in the amount of **\$19,435**. Keep in mind, I'm not including the costs of automobile transportation to/from the airports, food, lodging, etc. Just the plane ride.

Let's continue the running total: **\$72,881**.

Nothing these people do is dictated by any emergency to act so quickly that they need to fly immediately from one location to another at a cost of **\$72,881**. That is, **\$72,881** so far.

Dear Dr. Bennett, if you have any sympathy for Mississippi taxpayers and students, get rid of airplane N777AQ, now. And, if you don't give a damn about Mississippi taxpayers and USM students, get rid of it before it drags you to the same ignoble end that visited Martha Saunders.

To date, although the IHL visits usmnews 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.