

# Let's All Go to Texas

## Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ, Part 2

Yesterday we returned to reports about USM's airplane because usmnews.net recently acquired through a Mississippi Open Records 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 materially misrepresented information about the cost of N777AQ. Former-president Martha Saunders and former provost Lyman publicly and repeatedly reported the cost per flight hour of N777AQ as \$800. They were eager to boast about what a cost-effective deal Mississippi taxpayers and USM students were getting with their lease/purchase of N777AQ. We began reporting details of USM's costs as reflected in its internal records to expose the lie. Saunders and Lyman probably believed they could get away with it -- that no one would ever take the time and/or trouble using the Mississippi Open Records Act to obtain detailed cost and usage records, total the actual costs and the actual number of flight hours, and determine the real cost per flight hour of N777AQ.

Our updated actual cash cost per flight hour is \$4,840. If the nearly one million dollar balloon payment is included, the total cost per flight hour is \$6,941. If someone sold you a car for \$20,000 and handed you a bill for \$173,525, what would you call her?

On July 25, 2012, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid for a hugely expensive plane ride for a group of USM employees and others wholly unrelated to the education of USM students.

This boondoggle cost Mississippi taxpayers and USM students **\$31,929**. The passengers aboard the 4.7 hour flight trek from Hattiesburg, to Dallas-Fort Worth, to Houston, and back to Hattiesburg were J. Hammond, Athletic Director, L.F. Benvenuti (Manager of Constituent Relations Alumni Activities (whatever that is), Robert Pierce, Vice President for Advancement, former football coach E. Johnson, C. Johnson (could that be E. Johnson's wife Caroline?), and J. Paul, Vice President Student Affairs. Since USM has not provided an "Interdepartmental Invoice" reporting the purpose of the trip, usmnews.net researched possible purposes and found that on July 25, 2012 Conference-USA held a "Media Day" event in Irving, Texas, a suburb of Dallas-Fort Worth. In other words, the monumental waste of **\$31,929** was spent on a public relations extravaganza to discuss football and tout what became the worst football season in USM's history. How bad was the season? No wins and twelve losses.

Of course, sports advocates will remind us that the [Hammond](#), [Johnson](#) sports juggernaut didn't know that the season would be a financial and a performance disaster. What is clear from a foresight perspective is the shameful waste of time and money it is to continue to spend millions on a 100 year long mediocre football program at USM. For example, [USM students](#) and taxpayers have always had to [support](#) the shortfall of USM's "big money" sports with the additional fees USM charges them. In other words, USM's "big money" sports [costs student](#) and taxpayers "[big money](#)" with no discernable advance of the education of students.

Hey, what's the big deal? Students can always borrow more money; can't they?