

The IHL Taxi Service

IHL Members: “Hey! Let’s Fly Around Mississippi!”

Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ, Part 3

Day before yesterday, 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. Former-president Martha Saunders and former-provost Robert 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.

Several years ago, 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. Of course, simple incompetence--Saunders’ and Lyman’s incompetence--could explain their \$800 cost per flight hour claim, if it were not for the fact that usmnews.net reported in detail the actual cost per flight hour for years and people from the IHL have for years monitored usmnews.net regularly.

The 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**. Think of the \$800 misrepresentation this way: If someone sold you a car for \$20,000 and handed you a bill for \$173,525, what would you call her?

On September 19 and 20, 2012, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid a small fortune to taxi a couple IHL members aboard N777AQ around the state of Mississippi. Keep in mind, how were USM’s students’ education advanced?

This taxi-junket around the Magnolia State cost Mississippi taxpayers and USM students **\$16,658.40**. The passengers aboard the 2.4 hours of flights from Hattiesburg to Meridian to Hattiesburg, to Meridian to Jackson to Hattiesburg were IHL members C.D. Smith and A. Perry. Since USM has not provided an “Interdepartmental Invoice” reporting the purpose of the trip, usmnews.net is left wondering why the IHL spent **\$16,658.40** flying IHL members from Hattiesburg to Meridian to Hattiesburg to Meridian, then to Jackson and back to Hattiesburg.

What explanation could public servants, Smith and Perry, offer to justify such extravagance on the backs of students and their families? If they can’t or don’t offer one, it seems reasonable to conclude they are taking advantage of their positions to the detriment of USM students and Mississippi taxpayers. And, perhaps they are hoping no one in authority enforces accountability. In Mississippi, the probability of such people being held accountable is not great.

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