

What Is It With Sports?!

USM Is Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ, Part 7

As you review the series “USM Is Still Squandering Millions on Airplane N777AQ,” it’s impossible not to wonder how much time administrators spend on sports related activities. And how much money do they spend on sports? Or rather, how much student and taxpayer money do they spend on sports? And, by the way, isn’t USM an educational institution? Dear administrators, what are you doing to advance the education of USM students?

The answer is that their activities—as previously reported in this series and in today’s report, too—are so far removed from education, they seem to be living in their own little, but expensive, administrative world.

Here’s what their world looks like from their own records

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. 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 then handed you a bill for \$173,525, what would you call her?

On November 30, 2012, Mississippi taxpayers and USM students paid a small fortune to fly Interim president Aubrey Lucas and Athletic Director Jeff Hammond aboard N777AQ from Hattiesburg to Houston to Madison, Mississippi, and back to Hattiesburg. This four hours of flight cost Mississippi taxpayers and USM students **\$27,764**. for the use of N777AQ. What were Lucas and Hammond up to? USM didn’t provide an Interdepartmental Invoice for this **\$27,764** use of N777AQ. So, we’re left to guess. We do know, however, it’s highly improbable that

Hammond was accompanying Lucas to somehow advance the education of USM students but highly probable that Lucas accompanied Hammond on some sports related boondoggle.

No problem, though, students can borrow more money to cover the wasted resources.

HOLD THE PRESSES!

After following up on several occasions, I just received an “Invoice” for the November 30, 2012 (cost **\$27,764**) flight. USM failed to provide a complete set of information, the first time; the second time, the third time—you get the picture. Getting the University to comply with the Open Records Act is like pulling teeth. I cannot say whether USM’s failure to provide the documentation without extensive prodding was due to incompetent recordkeeping or other reasons.

In any event, USM’s “Invoice” dated January 23, 2013 for the flight dated November 30, 2012 states the purpose of the flight was “Donor Visit, Athletic Fundraising.” The documentation also said that “this expense will go through the USM Foundation.” The cost to the USM Foundation was “\$3,200” for the 4 hour flight. USM students and taxpayers are again screwed out of the actual cost by **\$24,564!** Also, Foundation resources that could have been used for research and/or scholarship support were spent elsewhere. Hey, taxpayers don’t know any better. Students don’t know any better, either. And, if taxpayers and students do know better, what are they going to do about it? Why shouldn’t USM administrators take advantage of them?

One last comment to this report: No indication was provided in the documentation that funds were raised by this very expensive use of N777AQ. Furthermore, usmnews.net was unable to find an announcement on the Foundation (USM or Athletic) web pages that any money was raised as a result of this trip.