

Takin' It to the Streets

by Victoria Tyler

To the surprise and puzzlement of many USM faculty, USM president Martha Saunders continues to talk publicly about her administration's response to the IHL Board's mandate that USM trim \$15 million from its FY 2012 budget. After giving her 7-minute State of the University (2010) address just a few days ago, Saunders provided *The Hattiesburg American*, *The Sun Herald* and other media outlets with a copy of that address. Some media outlets chose to include it on their editorial pages.

Saunders also provided *WDAM-TV News* with a guest video editorial, wherein she presented her take on the situation in different words. Apparently not hopeful that the editorial would be seen by enough local citizens, Saunders had her public relations team include a [link](#) to the editorial video on the USM webpage.



Like the other presentations, the editorial video is not flattering. It paints a picture of desperation, of someone more interested in being liked in the community and wanting to hang on to a rich administrative position than being a leader who is on top of the situation, doing what's best for the institution and its students. She also appears completely out of touch, beginning the viewpoint by saying: "At Southern Miss, we're celebrating our centennial on a good note." Saying that "[t]o meet our budget for next year, we've decided not to renew the contracts of several good teachers," she comes across as cold, and condescending to those 29 USM faculty scholars who are being terminated.

In the face of crisis, Saunders' instinct is to dive headlong into public relations mode. What the USM family is now learning, though, is that she's only as good at that, her so-called expertise, as she is at truly managing those crises. It's a shame that the USM family must now look to Southern Miss students, not its leaders, for [voices of wisdom](#), and hope for the future.