

# The Farm

## News Briefs from Southern Miss

7-January-2013

### **Lucas Not Taking any Blame for Bad Deal**

As Tim Doherty's 5-Jan-2013 [story for](#) *The Hattiesburg American* points out, interim USM president Aubrey Lucas is not taking any blame for the contract USM executed in Aug-2012 with former head football coach Ellis Johnson. Johnson first signed a "letter of intent" with USM officials, including former president Martha Saunders, now the provost at the University of West Florida, back in Dec-2011 that specified that he would be paid his base salary of \$700,000 in the event he was terminated without cause. That payment would occur, according to the letter of intent, even if Johnson secured employment elsewhere. As the story played out, Johnson was terminated in Nov-2012 after the first year of his four-year deal, thus obligating USM to provide him with \$2.1 million over the next three years. Johnson secured employment as defensive coordinator at Auburn University in Dec-2012, a position paying \$800,000 per year. As such, Johnson could earn \$1.5 million per year over the next few years.

As USMNEWS.net has reported in recent weeks, it is customary for coaching contracts to contain buyout offsets to account for employment elsewhere, such as that secured at AU by Johnson. Local media reports, discussed here at USMNEWS.net, point out that USM officials failed to follow customary procedures in this regard, however they also indicate that Lucas had eight months between Dec-2011 and Aug-2012 to correct this contractual shortcoming. Until Doherty's recent story, no word from Lucas on this matter has come from USM officials. Doherty reports that "Lucas said he had no choice but to honor the terms of Johnson's contract, which was signed by Lucas and Johnson in August [of 2012]." As Lucas told Doherty, "[y]ou cannot imagine the repercussions that would have taken place if I said I'm not going to sign this contract." As expected, the two faculty senators who spoke with Doherty about Lucas' involvement in this controversial episode stated that they were pleased that Lucas was working to prevent such bad deals in the future, including the contract with new USM coach Todd Monken. Neither, however, admonished Lucas for dropping the ball in the Johnson case, even though it cost USM \$2.1 million.

### **DeadSpin.com Still Hammering USM**

The popular website deadspin.com continues to hammer away at USM over the Ellis Johnson episode discussed above. Stories by Barry Petchesky and Doug Brown on [26-Dec-2012](#) and [27-Dec-2012](#) are particularly interesting. Each contains access to numerous e-mails acquired from USM by Petchesky and Brown via freedom of information laws. These stories shed light on what USM is doing to manage the large deficits being accumulated by the athletics department. The Doherty story discussed above adds that this year the deficit is project at \$1.2 million.