

Time to Step Up, Madam President

Working Toward a Brighter Day

January 21, 2009 3:52 PM | [Permalink](#)

We are currently engaged in the dismal process of cutting our budget by 5%, as required by the Governor. To add to our misery, we are preparing for the likelihood of additional cuts for FY10. It's not a pleasant task and we are using all care to protect people and programs central to the mission of the institution. The gloomy disposition of many on my staff is justified as we approach this distasteful assignment. Still, we work toward a brighter day and are moving aggressively to reach our strategic goals.

In spite of current adversity, we will create an improved climate for academic success; become recognized nationally as the premier research university of and for the Gulf South; forge stronger connections with community; and foster a culture of healthy minds, bodies and campus.

This is not the first time this university has faced tough economic times and it probably won't be the last. I took heart yesterday when President Obama, quoting George Washington, reminded us that America is strongest when facing common dangers. I believe Southern Miss is as well. His concluding remarks should inspire us:

"America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations...."

It is a sad time, but speak up, Madam President. It was 2% cuts, now it is 5%. The "FY10" proposed cuts are said to be 10%. Was that so hard? It is not pleasant, but why hang this on your staff. These are the times *you* earn your salary. You know you make more in a month than many in the state make all year; and in two months, you make more than most everyone in the state. You do not receive your salary for reading books and blogging about them, rah-rah-ing for various social causes, or judging cook-offs. Being optimistic is fine, but perceptions are important; so important that they can carry people through rough times. Times are tough – travel funds are gone. It will not get better soon – jobs will probably be lost. But how dare you even consider chiseling money from faculty (and perhaps staff) who make a fraction of what you do and then buy an airplane. Perception: I do not care about you or Southern Miss; I care about me. Leaders lead. When there is another raise, how about you, the Provost and other VPs, and Deans stay out of the raise pool so there is more for the faculty and staff? No one is asking you to sacrifice a paycheck, but you could; many faculty and staff cannot and survive. Perhaps you should ask Aubrey Lucas how he managed through the various lean periods in his administration. You need the perception we are all in this together at Southern Miss – even if you do not believe it. Admitting – finally – there is a problem, and then quickly

turning into Scarlett O'Hara and then invoking Barack and George is petty misdirection; sadly, that is what you have become known for.

Develop a plan for the times using data, not feelings and impressions of unknown people to those outside your dome. Tell everyone what the plan is and why you think it is the best plan. Work the plan. Refine the plan. That will show people you are really trying to make it better for Southern Miss rather than simply clicking your heels together three times and saying "There's no place like the future."