

President Saunders' Last Days Squandering Students' and Taxpayers' Money

Part 5 2012

“Does it really matter who is in charge?”

On May 16-17, 2012, President Martha Saunders had just, in the previous month, been “ousted” or “retired,” depending on whom you believe, and interim-President Aubrey Lucas was taking up right where she left off: squandering Mississippi taxpayers’ and USM students’ money flying N777AQ here and there. Look who helped him squander student and taxpayer money: Mr. Bob Owens—Vice President of the IHL, Ms. Robin Robinson—an IHL member, and Dr. Douglas Rouse—the [ethically challenged](#) IHL member.

Recent documents obtained via open records requests show that on May 16-17, 2012, our public servants—Lucas, Owens, Robinson, and Rouse—flew USM airplane N777AQ, from Hattiesburg to Jackson to Starkville to Jackson to Hattiesburg. USM’s Interdepartmental Invoice says the purpose of the flight: “IHL Board Meeting in Starkville.”

The number of flight hours reported in the pilot’s “King Air N777AQ Trip Log” was 1.8. USM documents show that the cost per flight hour is \$7,226.19. So, the cost of this flight to taxpayers and students is **\$13,007.14**.

Let’s repeat that: it cost Mississippi taxpayers and USM students **\$13,007.14** to transport President Lucas and three IHL members, not all IHL members, to an IHL meeting.

What would it have cost for these four public servants to drive to Starkville? Let’s run the numbers. According to Google Maps, the distance from Hattiesburg to Starkville is 187 miles. So, let’s be generous and assume that the distance is actually 200 miles each way. The Federal business mileage rate for 2012 is \$.555 per mile. $200 \times 2 \times \$.555 = \222 .

What could a student do with \$12,785.47 (the difference between the actual cost of the trip and the cost of driving)? Pay two semesters of tuition with money left over for fees and books.

Keep in mind the fundamental problem this trip represents. Members of IHL have oversight responsibility for the effective and efficient operations of Mississippi’s universities. IHL members compromise their oversight responsibilities while participating in squandering Mississippi taxpayer and student resources.