

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

Part 2 2012

“Everybody’s stupid but us.”

Why would anyone think you’d be stupid for believing the stated purpose of a recent use of the University of Southern Mississippi/Martha Saunders’ airplane, N777AQ? An understanding why begins with the stated purpose of a use of USM’s airplane N777AQ as quoted from USM’s invoice #001-110, which usmnews recently obtained through a Mississippi Open Records Act request. “Purpose: Discuss School of Nursing Funding and attend NCAA finals.”

That’s right, the stated purpose of using USM airplane N777AQ was to “Discuss School of Nursing and attending NCAA finals.” What in the hoops and hollers does a discussion of USM’s School of Nursing have to do with the NCAA basketball finals? And who would be dumb enough to believe that a discussion of the School of Nursing, any discussion of the School of Nursing would have to occur at the NCAA basketball finals?

Let’s see if we can make sense of these questions. Maybe the details from USM’s own records will shed some light on this apparent mismatch of topics. Here are the details. On April 2, 2012, N777AQ was flown round trip from Madison, MS to New Orleans, LA. Passengers as reported by invoice #001-110 were “**Chad Driskell**—Executive Assistant to President Martha Saunders, **Philip Gunn**—Speaker of the House, Mississippi House of Representatives, **Merle Flowers**—Senator, Mississippi Senate, **Scott Delano**—Representative, Mississippi House of Representatives, **Clare Hester**—Partner and Founder of Capital Resources, a lobbying business, **Michael Goode**.” However, the pilots’ Trip Log excludes Michael Goode but includes H. Friegler in addition to the others identified on the invoice. Anybody know why there’s a discrepancy in USM’s records? Anyway, that’s another report.

Why are all these politicians traveling to NCAA basketball finals to discuss the School of Nursing? At the expense of USM students and Mississippi taxpayers? Lord only knows? Maybe He’ll help with an explanation. You can bet USM administrators or state legislators won’t peep about their _____. You fill in the blank. Let’s take a look at the costs? That’s something we do know about.

The cost to USM students and taxpayers for just the use of the airplane N777AQ is the cost per flight hour times the number of flight hours, i.e., \$7,226.19. per flight hour x 3 flight hours or \$21,678.57. (For details and copies of source documents obtained from our recent open records request, see [Part 1](#) in this series.

Let’s repeat that. The freebee junket to the NCAA basketball final for state politicians and USM administrators to discuss USM School of Nursing—Jeez, it sounds stupid just saying it -- just the use of airplane N777AQ cost USM students and Mississippi taxpayers **\$21,687.57**. (That doesn’t include costs for transportation from the airport to their hotel

and to the games, tickets to the games, food, booze, etc.)

Feel stupid, yet? To put up with this kind of corruption, what do you think USM administrators and state politicians think about your brains?

Be sure to thank Martha Saunders. She bought N777AQ during the worst recession in decades and while firing dozens of faculty. That's USM brains in action.