

President Saunders: Inefficient and Ineffective Use of Students' and Taxpayers' Money

Part 4

2011 Costs and Uses of King Air N777AQ

Closing on Big Donations?

usmnews.net reports President Saunders' 2011 cost and use of a multi-million dollar airplane, King Air N777AQ. You have a right to know. Your money is paying for it.

Our news in this series continues with records recently received from USM via open records requests. This report is entitled "Closing on Big Donations?" for good reason. The passengers of this flight were President Martha Saunders and Markus Jones, USM Foundation staff, a Development Officer. According to Invoice No.: 001-104, the purpose was to "Make Donor Calls." No further information was provided: no donations, no prospect of donations, nothing. Just a trip in Dr. Saunders' plane.

The pilots' "Trip Log" recorded 5.5 flight hours for flights from Hattiesburg, MS, to Jacksonville, FL, to Tampa, FL, to Orlando, FL, and back to Hattiesburg.

Here's what that trip actually cost USM students and Mississippi taxpayers:

\$30,256.05 = (\$5,501.10 cost per flight hour X 5.5 actual flight hours)

[For details of measuring cost per flight hour based on USM's cost records, [click here.](#)]

If the contractual obligation President Saunders signed for her airplane with regard to a balloon payment is included, the actual cost to USM students and Mississippi taxpayers is:

\$44,412.01 = (\$8,074.91 cost per flight hour X 5.5 actual flight hours)

President Saunders charged USM Foundation \$4,400 (5.5 X \$800). Invoice No.: 001-104. **A \$40,000 undercharge!** This is an appalling misuse of the resources Mississippi taxpayers and USM students have entrusted to Saunders.

If that weren't enough of an incompetent fiduciary performance, here's what you should have expected from a long-distance personal visit to donors by a university president. Before Markus Jones scheduled Saunders for a very expensive trip, the donor should be in the final stages of making an affirmative decision. A university president should not be making low probability solicitations.

What are we told in the official records about the success of this trip? Nothing. No success or prospect for success. No donation (or none worthwhile trumpeting) from any

of the three stops at Jacksonville, Orlando, or Tampa. In fact, we don't even know who she visited. We can reasonably believe that she didn't accomplish anything because no donations big enough to justify a \$44,000 trip have been announced.