

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

Part 5

2011 Costs and Uses of King Air N777AQ

Students and Taxpayers Pay for Another Flight to a Football Game for President Saunders and Relatives and IHL Members

usmnews.net reports President Saunders' 2011 costs 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 "Students and Taxpayers Pay for Another Flight to a Football Game for President Saunders, Relatives and IHL Members" for good reason.

The passengers on this October, 2011 flight to see a Navy versus USM football game included President Martha Saunders and her husband, Joe Bailey, Joe Paul, Vice President of Student Affairs and IHL Member, Scott Ross.

The pilots' "Trip Log" recorded 5.0 flight hours for flights from Hattiesburg, MS, to Baltimore MD and back to Hattiesburg.

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

\$27,505.50 = (\$5,501.10 cost per flight hour X 5.0 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:

\$40,374.55 = (\$8,074.91 cost per flight hour X 5.0 actual flight hours)

How does this fun outing for President Saunders, her husband, and an IHL member advance the education of USM students?

We know deserving students who would benefit from scholarships -- and \$40,000 would clearly enable many dreams of a college education come true. Why do USM administrators waste student and taxpayer money? Perhaps the answer is this simple: because they can. The IHL is supposed to oversee the operations of USM but they are

willing participants in being compromised. For the rest of us, it's called a conflict of interest. And we're exemplifying time and again in this series of reports why there are regulations and laws against conflicts of interest. Who will enforce them? Dr. Saunders? The IHL?

It is interesting to note that Joe Paul, Vice President of Student Affairs, was on the plane, too. Instead of flying with President Saunders, he might have traveled with the student band. That time could have been well spent sensitizing band members and other Southern Miss representatives to the problems of racism. For example, contrary to what some Southern Miss alums claim, an athletic arena is not a free fire zone for racist chants. He might have also discovered that members of the band had not learned much in the way of geography. That information – far more than the comforts of Dr. Saunders' plane – would have had value to the educational mission of Southern Miss. Perhaps if Dr. Paul had made this simple choice, Southern Miss could have avoided its second national embarrassment growing out of what might be, at kindest, referred to as racial insensitivity in the past year.