

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

Part 7

Why is President Saunders Spending Thousands of Dollars in Student and Taxpayer Money to Go to a Funeral?

usmews.net's review of President Saunders' use of a multi-million dollar airplane, King Air N777AQ, continues with the receipt of USM's cost records for 2011. As with previous reports of the 2011 cost records, we'll detail President Saunders' decision to use N777AQ. In Part 7, we ask why is she spending a small fortune to go to a funeral? And, adding insult to injury, why take an assistant? Students and taxpayers have a right to ask and get answers to these questions because it's their money she's spending, some might conclude, squandering.

Why spend a small fortune of students' and taxpayers' money to go to a funeral?

On May 9, 2011, the pilots' "[King Air N777AQ Trip Log](#)" reports that "M. Saunders [USM President], C. Driskell [Assistant to the President]" take a trip aboard N777AQ. Pilots' log reported "Destinations": HBG, TUP [Tupelo], HBG." The purpose, according to "University of Southern Mississippi [Interdepartmental Invoice](#), dated 4/12/2011," was to "Attend Funeral for Senator Jack Gordon." (Please note that the Invoice date, 4/12/2011, is impossible, unless President Saunders knew a month beforehand of the death and funeral.) The invoice requests payment from "Assistant to the President" in the amount of **\$1,280**. **\$1,280** is arrived at by using President Saunders' inaccurate charge of \$800 per flight hour times 1.6 actual flight hours. (For an explanation why \$800 is inaccurate, see, President Saunders' and USM's own [cost records](#).)

The actual cash outflow cost per flight hour is *not* \$800 per flight hour. According to USM's own current records, it is more than **\$5,500** in actual current cash outflow cost per flight hour. If the balloon payment of \$907,053.85 (which is contractually required to be paid at the end of the lease period) is included, the cost per flight hour is over **\$8,000**.

So, according to USM's Interdepartmental Invoice, USM charges USM for the trip. Translation: USM charges USM students and Mississippi taxpayers for the use of N777AQ. Note, however, the actual cost to USM students and MS taxpayers is, according to USM's own cost records, **\$12,800** (1.6 flight hours x \$8,000) for the use of N777AQ to attend Senator Jack Gordon's funeral.

Why does President Saunders need to spend **\$12,800** to attend a funeral in Tupelo, MS? And, take an assistant, too? Let's see what USM says about the job description of the assistant. "Chad Driskell is serving as the interim vice president for administrative affairs, effective Feb. 1, 2012. Driskell has been [executive assistant to the president for external](#)

[affairs](#) since September 2007.”

That’s it! That’s his job description: “assistant to the president.” If Dr. Saunders felt the overwhelming need to have Mr. Driskell’s company, couldn’t he have driven Dr. Saunders in a University car? It was only a 500 mile round trip. Let’s see, using the 2011 [federal mileage rate](#) (\$.51 per mile) the cost would be \$255. That’s a lot cheaper than even the \$1,280 claimed by Dr. Saunders. However, if you compare the cost of driving (\$255) to the real cost (\$12,800), you have to ask yourself:

What are these people doing!? Who’s watching these administrators? Who’s making them accountable for the money they’re spending?

How many student scholarships could have been provided to our students? Students who need a chance in life and need a hand up. Don’t forget alternative uses for the money Dr. Saunders is frittering away on an airplane for questionable uses and purposes. For example, is flying to a funeral, instead of simply driving, worth annual tuition for two deserving students?