

Editorial

Unexpected Resignations Jack-In-The-Box Surprises at USM

A recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* report, entitled "[Lost in Transition](#)" by Gene C. Fant, Jr. resonates for us at the University of Southern Mississippi. Mr. Fant begins by noting:

One of the most difficult things about the job search is the monkey wrench that appears out of nowhere, upending what had been a smooth process. There is no bigger monkey wrench than the unexpected resignation of a campus leader.

He goes on to ask:

Have you seen someone whose career was affected negatively by a change in leadership that directly affected those who were connected administratively to the person who resigned?

Here's how it resonates for those of us at USM:

Negatively affected by a change in leadership? What leadership?

Like a jack-in-the-box surprise, we have experienced one leadership failure after another--also known as "unexpected resignations." Why the surprises? The secrecy with which the "leaders" were selected and function at our school -- and probably at others, too -- makes the "resignations" feel like a surprise.

We catch these "leaders," from time to time, up to no good, and prove it when we obtain information about their activities through freedom of information requests, and publish the findings at [usmnews.net](#). But do you believe we catch all the mismanagement or misconduct? Of course not.

Recently, another surprise "resignation" occurred. Bye-bye Martha Saunders. After a while, we get another surprise. The name of the new president. Rodney Bennett. Chosen primarily through a secret process just like the one used to select Martha Saunders, and various other presidents of state universities around the State of Mississippi.

Here's how the selection process happens -- the short version. The Institutions of Higher Learning (our board of trustees) announced a "preferred candidate." Surprise! We'd never heard of the guy. The community was given a few hours to assess the "preferred candidate"--no comparisons with the alternative candidates

were allowed. They are unknown. We learn from a source other than the IHL that his academic rank at his recent job is associate professor. Ouch. We're not off to a good start. The "preferred candidate" made two presentations, one at the main campus, the other at the satellite campus. Purpose: to give the community a chance to offer the IHL feedback. A few minutes after the "preferred candidate's" presentations, the IHL forthwith affirmed it's "preferred candidate" as the new president. And, we've begun again with the same secrecy we've experienced again and again. Can we expect secrecy from this "preferred candidate's" presidency, too? Take a wild guess.

More than likely, we'll wake some not-very-distant future morning and--Surprise!-- President Bennett "resigns." And we do it all over again. To borrow a cliché often attributed to Ben Franklin -- "Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results."

No wonder USM is a fourth tier, bottom-of-the-barrel, university.