

## Vote of No Confidence Directed at UWF President Judith Bense

[WearTV in Pensacola](#) is reporting that on September 12, 2014, the University of West Florida Faculty entered a vote of no confidence against President Judith Bense. According to WearTV, no specific reason was given for the vote. By September 13, 2014, the UWF Board of Trustees called an [emergency meeting](#) for Monday, September 15. Although many suspect the meeting is to deal with the issue, the Board of Trustees has not stated that it's emergency meeting and the vote of no confidence are related. Bense has been president of UWF since mid-2008.

Sources question former USM President and current UWF Provost's Martha Saunders' role in Bense's problems.

In November 2012, UWF president Judy Bense expressed excitement at bringing Saunders *back to* UWF as provost, saying, “[w]e’re delighted to welcome Martha back to the UWF campus. She is a proven leader and her wealth of experience will be a tremendous asset to our team, as we plan the implementation of our new strategic plan. I look forward to working with Martha to meet the challenges we face now and in the future.”

What Bense did not mention was naming of Saunders to the position as provost came only days after the USM and [wider community learned](#) that Saunders' 27-April-2012 resignation from the USM presidency was not a resignation after all. Instead, Saunders was [forced out of the presidency](#) by the Mississippi IHL. That information was uncovered by *WDAM-TV's* Randy Swan, whose *7 on Your Side* news team also learned that Saunders was never awarded tenure by Mississippi higher education authorities back in 2007, when she moved into the USM presidency from her post as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. Saunders' agreement with the IHL, at the time she was forced out of the USM presidency back in April-2012, provided one year (2012-13) on the faculty at USM-GC as an *untenured* professor of communications, with *the possibility* of up to two one-year renewals to follow. As such, securing alternative employment, or entering retirement, was essential for Saunders going forward.

After barely a year provost at UWF in November 2012, Saunders was aggressively, and ultimately unsuccessfully, pursuing the presidency of the College of Charleston. Now, many are suggesting that Saunders will attempt to position herself to replace Bense. Given Saunders history of passing the buck no one really expect she will defend Bense or take responsibility for any of Bense's woes.

For a glimpse at Saunders' character, or lack thereof, consider Saunders' roll in the so-called Tablegate Scandal at USM which involved improper use of hundreds of thousands of dollars in state funds to provide Samsung Galaxy Tabs to students, faculty, and politicians. Saunders spent considerable time and energy in an effort to completely distance her name from the malfeasance associated with events surrounding that scandal.

*The Hattiesburg American's* veteran higher education reporter Ed Kemp's 23-November-2011 [news report](#) for *The Hattiesburg American* entitled "Auditor looking at tablet program," the Mississippi (and wider) public learned that the program not only provided hundreds of USM students with the Samsung technology devices, both *faculty* and *state officials* were recipients, including Mississippi Higher Education Commissioner Hank Bounds. According to Caron Blanton, Mississippi IHL spokesperson, Bounds was sent one of the Samsung tablets by USM officials earlier in the fall (2011), however Blanton claims that the tablet was returned to USM in unused condition by Bounds. Still, the actions by USM executives have prompted a state audit that is being handled by both State Auditor Stacey Pickering and officials with the IHL. That audit is, among other things, looking into whether the \$400,000+ contract effected by USM violated state law, part of which states that university contracts as large as \$250,000 must receive IHL Board approval. Blanton told Kemp that the USM contract never appeared before the IHL Board, which is represented by the Mississippi Attorney General's office.

USM president Martha Saunders worked feverishly to distance herself from the scandal, telling Kemp that she was "very, very, very saddened . . . that [her] employees . . . have been caught up in" this serious issue. Saunders was, of course, referring to former USM provost Robert Lyman, chief information officer Homer Coffman, and procurement/contract services director Mike Herndon, all of whom were placed on administrative leave by Saunders. Saunders also added (in her interview with Kemp) that, although she was aware of the Galaxy Tab program, she was in the dark about the contract and the details surrounding it. Saunders informed Kemp that *iTech* contracts do not come across her desk for review, and that she assumed that any contract involving the Samsung tablets had been administered properly by *iTech*. Sources told *usmnews.net* that Saunders was clearly attempting to dodge any and all responsibility. Some went as far as to say she appeared about as *unpresidential* as a university president can appear. They also added that her comments relating to how relaxed contracting procedures are at USM, thus implicating any and all state agencies/institutions in similar practices, seem to suggest that perhaps millions of taxpayer dollars are inappropriately spent each year, and such taxpayer fleecing is practically undiscoverable. Lastly, sources tell *usmnews.net* that, at the very least, USM faculty and staff came to know far more than they wanted about Saunders' character, or lack thereof.