

“Sweetheart Deals” and “Dubious Contracts”

A [July 5, 2012 report](#) in *The Hattiesburg American* offered a story entitled “Shelby Thames retires after four decades at USM.”

Before I get to comments about Dr. Thames retirement, for the sake of full disclosure, I personally liked Dr. Thames. Regardless of criticisms I’ve expressed, I’d enjoy sitting with him and reminiscing over a few cold beers. He’s smart and witty with a deep commitment to the University of Southern Mississippi.

During his administration, he asked to talk to me and we spent over an hour discussing the University and College of Business. Although I had been publicly advocating a change in the research culture in the College of Business, it was an unusual event for a busy president. I suspect, now, that because of several secret petitions to fire me, which I obtained several years later through freedom of information requests, that Dr. Thames was personally taking a measure of me to see if the wild accusations made by James Crockett, Patty Munn, and others had any basis in fact. He never took any action against me, so I assume he didn’t believe Crockett, Munn, et al. The meeting was done under the pretext of learning about the College of Business.

At our meeting, President Thames discussed the frustrations he had before becoming president. USM professors had crippled his funding efforts for bringing research professors to the Polymer Science Research Center. I commiserated with similar frustrations of being prevented from supporting young research professors when accounting administrators/faculty like James Crockett insisted on consuming research money for himself. Crockett had never published in a reputable journal, much less a reputable research journal, in his many decades as an administrator/faculty member. His political savvy to capture the School of Accountancy’s research money proved a waste of research resources on an administrator who was to retire in the very near future.

Thames and I agreed the research culture at USM needed to change. I, like so many others at USM, were saddened when events got away from all of us during his administration. It was clearly a frustrating time at USM, but is Thames to blame for all of it? No.

Dr. Saunders definitely has little or no understanding of research (read her dissertation if you want to understand that claim). Regardless, she, on the other

hand, got the same wild accusations about me, didn't take the time to talk to me, but took immediate, hasty, action that wound up costing USM better than \$2.5 million in legal fees and other costs. A lot more than it cost USM when Dr. Thames butted heads with Professors Glamser and Stringer. A result, the weak research culture at the College of Business, School of Accountancy has prevailed. Regardless of the millions Saunders wasted hastily prosecuting me for, as we proved, trumped up accusations, I'm still a tenured full professor, drawing full pay and benefits, at USM. Her [depositions clearly indicate incompetence](#) to run a university. That type of thoughtless behavior clearly played a role in her recent "resignation" and is obvious to anyone who has observed one scandal after another during her administration. However, if you think Thames screwed up, he's at least the real deal. Saunders is puffery and public relations. Airbrushed. USM and the Hattiesburg community have seen more airbrushed pictures of her than the heroines of any movie release.

Now to today's report, "Shelby Thames retires..."

THA report says, "But sources close to the administration of his [Thames] successor President Martha Saunders say Thames left over a legacy of dubious contracts ("sweetheart deals") from his presidency, including an exorbitant contract with an intellectual property licensing company, Noetic Technologies."

If there were "dubious contracts" ("sweetheart deals") "left over" from the Thames administration when Saunders took over 5 years ago, what did she do about them? Sit on them for 5 years? Do nothing about them? Participate and extend them?

Keep in mind, there are acts of commission and acts of omission. Doing nothing about corruption is to condone corruption. It is to participate in corruption.

What kind of people control USM? What kind of debacle awaits USM, waiting to explode, like a Penn State calamity? Does it take a totally disgusting revelation for the citizens of Mississippi, the IHL, and university leadership, including faculty, to take action to set USM on a path of integrity the citizens of Mississippi can eventually confidently entrust the education of its young adults? Or are puffery and public relations what we really want?