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wed, 12 Nov 2003 09:23:15 -0600

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From: "Lisa S. Mader" lisa.s.mader@usm.edu>
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"Donna Ritchey" <dritchey@godwin.com>, "Sidney Bellard" <sbellard@i-55.com>,

"Scot Slay" <SSlay@ECD.org>, "Bob Pierce" <Bob.Pierce@usm.edu>,

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"Kelly Riley" <kriley@governor.state.ms.us>, <mboyd@governor.state.ms.us>,
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"Lee Ann MAYO" <LMAYO@governor.state.ms.us>, <LeighAGreg@aol.com>,
"'Mark Goodman'" <mark.goodman@usm.edu>,
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"Myrop. Hoppy" <myrop. bonpy@usm.edu>,
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SOUTHERN MISS ANNOUNCES PLANS TO PURSUE TEACHING HOSPITAL ON GULF COAST

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HATTIESBURG - Challenged by Congressman Gene Taylor to fill the health = care needs of war veterans, The University of Southern Mississippi = announced plans today it would seek a collaboration with the Gulfport VA = hospital that would transform it into a teaching hospital.

Speaking at a Veterans' Day Ceremony in Gulfport, Taylor = challenged Southern Miss President Dr. Shelby Thames to give back to a = veteran community that has "sacrificed so much" for its country.

"There is talk of shutting down the Gulfport VA and running = it at the Biloxi VA, and I don't like that one bit," said Taylor, who is = a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee in the House of = Representatives.

Turning to Dr. Thames, who was in attendance at the = ceremony, Taylor continued: "I know Dr. Thames and I know he never backs = away from a challenge. That's why he has offered his expertise and the = expertise of those at The University of Southern Mississippi to team up = with the Veterans Administration to transform the VA Gulfport into a = teaching hospital, which will care for the veterans of this country = while training the next generation of health care professionals in south = Mississippi."

Dr. Thames said Taylor asked him personally to look at the = health care needs of the veterans of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to = "do whatever we could as a comprehensive university to see that those = needs were met."

Veterans are currently having to wait for medical treatment = because of a lack of available services, Dr. Thames said. With Southern = Miss being on the Gulf Coast and having a Bachelors through Ph.D = programs and facilities that stretch all the way from Stennis Space = Center to Ocean Springs, it makes sense that our university should fill = that health care void, he said.=20

"This is a tremendous facility here in Gulfport, a gorgeous = facility that was a hospital and is still a hospital, so basically it's = just a matter of amalgamating our programs together," Dr. Thames said. = "And the cost of doing this in a cooperative fashion will be = significantly less than if we attempted to start a health care facility = for these veterans from scratch."

Dr. Thames said Southern Miss, which educates more nurses = than any other school in the state and offers degrees through the Ph.D. = level, already has nurses working in cooperation with the VA hospital. = "We have psychologists down here on staff, and some of their = psychologists come to Hattiesburg and teach. We could do that in a much = more extensive collaboration, save lots of money and become much more = efficient and offer programs we do not now currently offer."

The next step in this process, Dr. Thames said, is for the = university to talk with the constituents of the Gulf Coast - patients, = veterans, VA administrators, staff, business leaders, educators - and to = determine "what the real needs are and what it is they want Southern = Miss to do."

"Since we've been issued this challenge, I think it's = imperative that we take this seriously and make a strong effort to find = out what those needs are, then go to our =20

Board of Trustees at the Institutions for Higher Learning and say, 'Here = is the need, we want to fill it.'"

Edwin Cassell, chief of voluntary service at the Gulfport = VA, said he thinks veterans and citizens of the Gulf Coast would welcome = efforts by Southern Miss to turn the embattled hospital into a teaching = facility.

"You could just tell by the reception today that a lot of = people are excited about this," Cassell said.

Taylor said that the need for such a hospital is long overdue. More than = one third of the state's veterans live in the fourth congressional = district and the number will peak in about 12 years, he said. "For the = foreseeable future, this is a challenge because the number of veterans = we have will never be smaller than what we have now. It's here today and = it's going to be an even bigger challenge 10 years from now. We're = always going to have veterans, from the Iraq war to future wars that = must be taken care of," Taylor said.

Citing Southern Miss' success in building world-class = polymer science and medical technologies programs, Taylor said it is = just "the next logical step to develop a medical center using the = buildings that are available in Gulfport and using the patients that are = there needing to be seen."

As the demographics of an aging nation start to favor = retirees over working-age populations, more health care professionals = will be necessary to meet rising medical needs, Taylor said. "We have a = lot of people who'll have great unmet needs unless we have more of these = professionals, and so we're fulfilling that need. Once they graduate = they can go out and serve patients in south Mississippi, so I see lots = of good things coming from this."

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Lisa Slay Mader Director, Marketing and Public Relations The University of Southern Mississippi Phone (601)266-4491 Fax (601) 266-5381 www.usm.edu/pr ----=\_NextPart\_000\_06CB\_01C3A8FE.CE7BB840 Content-Type: text/html; charset="iso-8859-1" Content-Transfer-Encoding: quoted-printable <!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//w3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN"> <HTML><HEAD> <META http-equiv=3DContent-Type content=3D"text/html; = charset=3Diso-8859-1"> <META content=3D"MSHTML 6.00.2800.1141" name=3DGENERATOR> <STYLE></STYLE> </HEAD> <BODY bgColor=3D#ffffff> <DIV><FONT face=3DArial size=3D2> <P class=3DMsoNormal style=3D"MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: center"=20</pre> align=3Dcenter><FONT size=3D3><FONT face=3D"Times New Roman"><B=20 style=3D"mso-bidi-font-weight: normal">SOUTHERN MISS ANNOUNCES PLANS TO = PURSUE=20

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<DIV><FONT face=3DArial size=3D2>--<BR>Lisa Slay Mader<BR>Director, =
Marketing and=20
Public Relations<BR>The University of Southern Mississippi<BR>Phone=20
(601)266-4491<br/>BR>Fax (601) 266-5381<br/>BR><A=20
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