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NAPOLITANO MISSES ESSENCE OF NEW ORLEANS PROBLEM.

This past Friday, Secretary of Homeland Security **Janet Napolitano** was [interviewed](#) by Essence.com's **Cynthia Gordy** -- a member of that curiosity seen among the Washington press corps these days that's referred to as the "[Black News Media](#)" -- about progress in New Orleans' post-Katrina recovery. It was good that Napolitano was able to step away for a moment from pressing drug war and immigration issues to tour [New Orleans](#) with HUD Secretary **Shaun Donovan** for an assessment of the recovery process. Unsurprisingly, they found that the rebuilding there is still roughshod, and not due to any fault of the neighborhoods, which have been doing their [best](#) with what little they have. The problem they found, unsurprisingly, has been government failure to get money where it's needed.

Early in the convo with Gordy, Napolitano shows that she and President **Barack Obama** get that the effort needs fuller funding:

We have moved special teams to Louisiana to speed up decisions on projects that need reimbursement or need to be paid for. We have consolidated management so projects don't have to go from one office to another to be approved. And we're working with state and local governments in their own recovery efforts. ... The view of the President is that this recovery needs to proceed as expeditiously as possible. It's also consistent with stimulating the economy, getting dollars out there to create jobs, schools, fire stations, and police stations. Getting the money out to get those rebuilt and replaced, that's what we're focused on now.

Freeing up public monies would, finally, be great, especially given all the financial heavy-lifting that philanthropies and non-profits have had to provide. But there's one point Napolitano didn't get, or better said, overlooked. After acknowledging to Gordy that she didn't think "there ever is a levee big enough to withstand a Katrina-size storm," Napolitano continued:

But my understanding is the levees are being redone, and they will be much stronger than they were before. ... It's that kind of attitude we have: let's identify the problem, let's figure out what we need to do to fix it, and see how quickly we can move.

As **Mark Davis**, director of the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy, wrote in our [special report](#) on rebuilding the Gulf Coast, the levees never have, and likely never will, be a sure thing for defending New Orleans. More surety lies in restoring and fortifying the wetlands and marshes, which are the area's most natural and best defenses against storms. Such work isn't exactly in Homeland Security's bailiwick, but neither is the levees system, which itself is a byzantine patchwork of federal, state, local and private ownership and jurisdictions.

-- *Brentin Mock*

Posted by Alexandra Gutierrez on March 30, 2009 4:19 PM | [Permalink](#)

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The City of Amsterdam, along with most urbanized areas of the Netherlands, is protected against a 1 in 10,000 year flood event. So, any given year, there is a .01% chance of your house flooding. Over a thirty-year mortgage, you have a .3% chance of experiencing flooding.

If you bought that same house in New Orleans, you would have a 30% chance of flooding over the span of your mortgage.

The Army Corps is promising 1 in 100 level flood protection by 2011.

Katrina was a 1 in 400 storm.

I'm so sick of hearing the WATB at DHS whine about how *hard* it would be to build a decent flood protection system. Here's my suggestion. Fire the Army Corps of Engineers and hire the Dutch. They seem to have it figured out.

Posted by: alli | [March 30, 2009 4:59 PM](#)

Let me add, though, that you're right about the wetlands - but good luck getting the people who caused all the damage (that would be you, Chevron, Shell, et al) to pony up to fix it.

The state barely has a royalty sharing agreement and that's only because Landrieu had to beg for one. Alaska has a permanent fund and we are still fighting for scraps.

Posted by: alli | [March 30, 2009 5:04 PM](#)

Correction: In New Orleans the levees system is NOT a byzantine patchwork of federal, state, local and private ownership and jurisdictions.

In New Orleans the levee design and construction is 100% federal.

Posted by: Sheldonville | [March 30, 2009 5:45 PM](#)

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