

EPA Leader Optimistic About Rebuilding

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Students at Tulane have a special role to play in this defining moment, Lisa Perez Jackson, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, told the audience in Freeman Auditorium at the John J. Witmeyer III Dean's Colloquium on Wednesday (Nov. 18).



During her visit to the Tulane uptown campus, EPA administrator Lisa Perez Jackson urges Tulane students to continue working on behalf of environmental issues. (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

Jackson, a 1983 chemical engineering summa cum laude graduate of Tulane, is the first African American to lead the EPA under the first African American president of the United States. It was her first visit to New Orleans?her hometown?since she became head of the EPA.

"I think that this city cannot help but be better and more prosperous because you are here," Jackson said to students in the audience.

Out of the "horrific" tragedy of Hurricane Katrina has come a transformation, said

Jackson. Students at Tulane and New Orleanians understand more "poignantly" than most people "their connection to the natural world, their connection to the environment, their connection to the engineering that created the loss of the wetlands?and their connection to the engineering that most certainly will be key to restoring some of them."

Tulane is turning out a new generation of leaders and innovators, said Jackson. "I think you will shine a bright light not only for people here but across the country."

She encouraged the "best and brightest" engineers and scientists from Tulane to join her in working at the EPA.

"You have to be an optimist to work on environmental issues," Jackson said.

After her tour of the city this week, Jackson said she is "optimistic for this time and place." The way that New Orleans is rebuilding with attention to energy efficiency and fuel innovation, including solar panels, gives her hope.

"As a person who cares passionately about the environment, I want to see you stay involved in these issues because then I know the issues that I care about will be strong, live long and prosper as well."