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### **Landrieu Threatens to Hold Up Senate Recess Until Flood Protection Upgrades Pass**

**Monday , November 28, 2005**

NEW ORLEANS — U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., said Monday she is prepared to prevent the U.S. Senate from taking Christmas and New Year's break until Washington has approved money to pay for flood protection improvements along Louisiana's coast.

"We may be getting to a point where we've just got to raise the level of attention" on Louisiana's critical flood control needs, Landrieu said Monday while touring damaged neighborhoods here with Boudewijn J. van Eenennaam, the Dutch ambassador to the United States. "We've got to get people down here to walk through these neighborhoods, to see these houses, to see the stretch of devastation along the whole Gulf Coast."

It has been three months since Hurricane Katrina came ashore in southeast Louisiana and Mississippi, blowing up surges of water from the Gulf of Mexico that swamped numerous neighborhoods up to rooftops.

The middle-class subdivisions toured Monday remain devoid of life, other than random insurance adjusters taking notes. The smell of sewage and rotting refuse piled in front yards or still stewing inside mud-caked homes lingers still.

Tiffany Bennett, a 28-year-old graphic artist who spoke to touring dignitaries outside her flooded home in the eastern part of the city, said she and her neighbors have felt paralyzed by uncertainty as they mull over how to proceed with their lives.

She and her relatives want to rebuild, but fear the effort and expense will be wasted if flood protection does not improve, she said.

"This has been my home for so long, it's like three generations lost," said Bennett, whose parents and grandparents also lost homes to flooding in the eastern part of the city. She has found an apartment in New Orleans and still has her job, but many of her relatives and friends remain out of town.

"The people aren't coming back because we don't know what to do," she said. "Part of it is making sure the levees are secure so we don't have to do this every year."

Landrieu has led several tours with colleagues and dignitaries through communities in the New Orleans area that were virtually wiped out by Hurricane Katrina. She also intends to take an American delegation to the Netherlands to look at how the low-lying country has saved itself from catastrophic flooding for more than half a century.

Van Eenennaam said Dutch engineers agree southeastern Louisiana could be rebuilt and well protected, much as the Netherlands was after widespread flooding in 1953. It's a matter whether the federal government is willing to pay to build and properly maintain modern flood-control structures.

Some Dutch engineers who have visited Louisiana in recent months have decried poor construction and maintenance of levees and flood walls, responsibility for which lies with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state's local levee boards.

"Let me politely say I think there are some things that can be improved here," van Eenennaam said. "This is a matter of technical skill and a matter of money. Of course, this is a rich country, so it's a matter of political priorities."

Speaking with Bennett, who nearly broke down while discussing the destruction of her community, the ambassador sought to comfort her by noting that his country was "able to overcome this problem, so there is hope."

He also noted that what may seem like a hefty price to build a state-of-the-art flood control system can in fact be a rather small investment if it protects a densely populated area where industry exists.

Holland's entire flood-control system cost about \$18 billion in current dollars, plus about \$500 million per year for maintenance, which amounted to an investment of "less than pennies on the dollar" returned from economic activity in flood-protected parts of that country, he said.

For now, New Orleans levees are being rebuilt to withstand a Category 3 hurricane — or as strong as they were supposed to be before Katrina, although engineers have debated whether the levees were as sturdy as advertised. However, there remains little guaranteed money for rebuilding coastal wetlands or levee maintenance. And Louisiana officials are pushing for even stronger protection, enough to withstand the storm surge from a Category 5 storm, with winds greater than 155 mph and a storm surge generally greater than 18 feet above normal.

Landrieu said she has been struck by how difficult it has been to get Congress to understand that restoring Louisiana's coastline and building up its levees would be paid back many times over, given the amount of business done by the Port of New Orleans as well as the oil, gas, chemical, seafood, maritime and agricultural industries here.

Restoring the eroded coast also would preserve what wild life officials say is the most productive fishery, ecologically diverse wetland and most important migratory bird habitat in North America.

Landrieu wants Congress to agree to allow Louisiana to keep more of the federal taxes paid by the state's oil and gas industries as long as that money is dedicated exclusively to storm and flood protection.

Otherwise, she said she will resort to procedural motions permitted by Senate rules that would prevent the body from going into recess. It's a move rarely done, especially during the holidays when lawmakers want to return home to family. Landrieu said she won't feel guilty about that when hundreds of thousands of people in south Louisiana no longer have homes.

"There's been decades of under appreciation and under investment in the Gulf Coast region — the nation's only energy coast," she said. "We cannot rebuild this region without a strong commitment from the federal government."

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