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[FULL TEXT]

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From offshore drilling to the Baker Wetlands, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson tackled some of the nation and state's most controversial environmental issues Monday afternoon.

"I'm here today because so much of what I do every day is really about your future, and you have the power to influence the direction we go," Jackson told the crowd of students and faculty that had gathered at Kansas University's Spooner Hall.

Jackson, the first African-American woman to head the federal environmental regulatory agency, told the audience that she came to her role of protector of the environment not by the Teddy Roosevelt ideal of preserving pristine open spaces. Instead, she said her concern was in the "brownside" of the environment and ways to curb pollution.

"I always tease people I don't sleep outside, but I do my job to make sure you can," Jackson said.

Jackson acknowledged the criticism the agency has fallen under in recent years from those who believe environmental regulation has "hobbled" the economy.

Jackson went on to defend her agency, saying it is consistent with American values to not let industries pollute water with raw sewage, to keep vehicles from emitting lead toxins, to limit the mercury pollution coming from power plants and to monitor the chemicals used in producing food.

"We won't back down from protecting our kids from mercury pollution, or making sure that our food is safe and our water is clean," Jackson said.

Jackson did address one controversial local issue, the building of the South Lawrence Trafficway through the Baker Wetlands south of Lawrence. The area has been marked as a sacred space for Native Americans. Jackson was asked what role the EPA played in recognizing spiritual places in the siting process.

Tribes are given special roles in the consultation process, she said.

"I think when you talk about tribes that for many, many decades now, they have felt as though they don't have the
opportunity to move or be mobile, so their cultural sites are extremely important," Jackson said. "For those

reasons, finding out what those issues are is what the law says we should do."

And, as someone who grew up in New Orleans, Jackson said she recognizes the importance that wetlands play in flood prevention.

"When we didn't have them to break the impact of Hurricane Katrina, we missed them tremendously," Jackson said.

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Lisa Jackson grew up as a minority in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, an area struck by four hurricanes in the last 100 years.

As an engineering student at Tulane University, Jackson got involved with air quality issues and stopping pollution. She saw the impact of pollution and industrial waste on the Mississippi River firsthand. In 2005, Jackson's mother lost her home in Hurricane Katrina.

Now, Jackson is the first African American to serve as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Jackson fielded questions from students, faculty and guests about the EPA's role in boosting the economy and advocating for a cleaner environment at Spooner Hall yesterday during a visit to the University.

One of the EPA's goals is to expand conversation on the environment, Jackson said. "Communities care deeply about environmental issues. They just may or may not see themselves in the same issue as someone who's in a different type of community or has a lot more money or something of that nature."

The EPA sets national environmental and pollution standards, while states set their own policies and extent of regulation. Jackson said national standards are important because "the air doesn't stay in one state, and the water doesn't stay on the street." Regulations in one state can affect the level of pollution in neighboring states; environmental justice is important on the state and national level. "It's an issue of basic care and economic leveling of the playing field," Jackson said. "Everybody should play by the same set of rules."

Jackson commented on offshore drilling — a hot national topic after the BP Gulf oil spill in 2010 — and said it had an impact in evaluating the regulatory process.

"Whenever tragedy happens, people go 'Where were you?'" she said, explaining those types of questions from the community help environmental agencies and companies like BP change and adapt to environmental concerns. She also talked about the affect of lobbying on EPA's policies and the cultural impact of environmental decisions on American Indian territory and hydraulic fracturing, a process of fracturing the earth to mine natural gas and oil.

After the event, Jackson said college students always had a special relationship with the EPA.

"Young people always get it because they know they're getting ready to inherit what we leave them," Jackson said. "And so we leave them huge challenges like climate change."

Jackson also said students should look at how they already live on campus by using public transportation, choosing efficient foods and living in small spaces.

"One of the cool things about most campuses is that when they make up their mind, they go cleaner or greener," Jackson said.

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LAWRENCE, Kan. — University students can help shape environmental policies and should consider ways to improve their own impact on the environment, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency said during an appearance at the University of Kansas.

"I'm here today because so much of what I do every day is really about your future, and you have the power to influence the direction we go," Lisa Jackson told students and faculty Monday.

Jackson also said students should look at how they already live on campus by using public transportation, choosing efficient foods and living in small spaces.

"Young people always get it because they know they're getting ready to inherit what we leave them," she said. "And so we leave them huge challenges like climate change."

Jackson fielded questions about the EPA's role in boosting the economy and advocating for a cleaner environment and said one of the EPA's goals is to expand conversation on the environment.

The Lawrence Journal World reports that Jackson acknowledged the criticism the federal agency has received recently from those who say environmental regulations have "hobbled" the economy.

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"We won't back down from protecting our kids from mercury pollution, or making sure that our food is safe and our water is clean," Jackson said.