SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE YAZOO BACKWATER PROJECT

A series of editorials have been printed over a period of many months critical of the Yazoo Backwater Project, a much needed and federally-authorized flood control project. These editorials have culminated in the most recent attack (“Yazoo Pumps: Facts clear, it’s a waste of money”, The Clarion-Ledger, January 22, 2003). Only a few days later, Mississippi Senators Thad Cochran and Trent Lott both went on the Congressional record endorsing the Project; Congressman Bennie Thompson had endorsed the project in a Clarion-Ledger editorial the week before.

EDITORIAL: “...which former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt called a “cockamamie” idea...”

RESPONSE: This comment by Bruce Babbitt is continually trotted out by The Clarion-Ledger. We wonder how an Arizona Senator knows more about what's best for the Mississippi South Delta than Mississippi's own Washington delegation. Babbitt is certainly entitled to his own opinion; but he does not live here and, therefore, knows little from where he speaks. Is it “cockamamie” to keep a child safe from the terrors of floodwater? Can The Clarion-Ledger not find a better criticism than this?

EDITORIAL: “It’s made worse by the sneaky way in which it has now been slipped into a spending package before the U.S. Senate.”

RESPONSE: “Sneaky”? The U.S. Congress has funded this project each year since FY 1996 and was endorsed on C-SPAN—national television—by Senators Lott and Cochran in a live session aired on January 23, 2003.

EDITORIAL: “In fact, it won't solve flooding in the South Delta but will only reduce flooding.”

RESPONSE: No project is constructed to completely “solve” flooding; only an act of God can do that. The project will, however, solve many of the problems that families who inhabit over 1,000 homes in the area face during high water events. The Yazoo Backwater Project will lower the 100-year flood plain by 4 to 4.5 feet.

EDITORIAL: “In fact, it will mostly benefit a relative handful of owners of large tracts of land.”

RESPONSE: The key word here is “relative.” The vast majority of homeowners and citizens of the South Delta are not wealthy landowners; they are working class citizens, many at or just above the poverty level and most of whom are African-American. This Project is by no means a class warfare issue, though The Clarion-Ledger seems to want to paint it as such. Preliminary research by the Levee Board indicates that over 600 landowners in the 100-year flood plain in Yazoo County alone will benefit from the Project. This number does not include the five other counties impacted by the 100-year flood.

EDITORIAL: “But what’s often overlooked is that some have lived with the flooding there since the 1800’s. Others moved there for the low land cost.”

RESPONSE: Flooding in this area is affected by water from 41% of the continental United States. Development from other parts of the country in the Mississippi River drainage basin has increased flooding substantially since the 1800s. The South Delta area is now subject to flooding like never before. Moreover, citizens who moved to the South Delta after Congressional authorization of the Project in 1941 assumed they would have that protection of their lives and property in place. They are still waiting.

THE CLARION-LEDGER HAS CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED FEDERALLY FUNDED FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS FOR THE JACKSON METRO AREA. WHEN WILL THEY SUPPORT FLOOD CONTROL FOR THE DELTA?

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