

Questions remain after Obama's New Orleans visit

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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NEW ORLEANS — A day after an enthusiastic, almost-gushing crowd met President Barack Obama on his first visit to New Orleans since taking office, some in this still-suffering, hurricane-struck city are wondering when platitudes and political speak will give way to greater progress.

Among them is recent law school graduate Gabe Bordenave, 29, who sees what he considers a continued nickel-and-diming by the Federal

Emergency Management Agency over critical issues such as a downtown hospital damaged by Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.

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“I don’t want to hear how problems are being solved,” Bordenave said Friday. “I want to know why the problems are not solved.”

Obama vowed that Gulf Coast rebuilding would be a priority of his administration. After taking office, he dispatched top officials — including Cabinet secretaries — to figure out how to get recovery money to state and local governments more quickly.

By the time Obama was elected, progress was already being made in rebuilding levees, schools and homes, but it was often overshadowed by bureaucratic holdups and hard feelings among government officials about the response to Katrina and the slow pace of the massive recovery.

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ing Thursday, Obama cited
ch as taking on corruption in the
rity and reducing the number of
; in federally supplied trailers.

His administration says it has made changes that have helped free up more than \$1 billion in FEMA recovery money for the state and clear dozens of funding disputes.

But that's only a dent in the state's lengthy backlog of complaints and projects, and rules limit the federal government's obligation and how money can be spent.

Sandy Rosenthal, the founder and executive director of levees.org, said her disappointment with Obama's visit was intense, mostly because he referred to Katrina as a "disaster of nature." She said the levee failures that sent water pouring into the city prove it was a manmade disaster, too.

Others, like Terence Butler, are willing to give the president more time.

"I guess they're trying to do what they can," said the 52-year-old painter, speaking in a section of Gentilly where he said crime is a problem and reminders of Katrina's devastation — the FEMA trailer, empty house with overgrown yard and blue tarp strips flapping on a roof — are hard to miss.

Said Butler: "He did give a good speech."

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