

WASHINGTON, DC - House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (MD) sent a letter today to Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, which address sections of a report on the U.S. Park Police that was issued by the National Academy of Public Administration last week. The report supports the statements regarding a shortage of resources and manpower made by U.S. Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers, who was subsequently dismissed from her post as a result of those remarks.

*The text of the letter is as follows:*

September 21, 2004

Secretary Gale Norton

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

As you know, on September 15 the National Academy of Public Administration issued The U.S. Park Police: Aligning Mission, Priorities and Resources. This report, which was prepared at the request of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, assesses USPP's mission and functions, USPP's priorities and resources, and the feasibility of adjusting current functions.

In the concluding remarks of Chapter 1, the report frankly states:

*"After taking a hard second look at the role, functions, organization, and resources of the USPP, the Panel's basic conclusion is: 'You can't have it both ways.' Given its heightened responsibilities after 9/11 for protection of the nation's most important icons and urban national*

*parks, USPP cannot be an effective guardian of urban national parks and also attempt to be a full-service urban police force without a substantial increase in resources. It is even more urgent now than when first recommended in 2001 that the mission of the U.S. Park Police be clarified and priorities be set to meet needs established jointly by the DOI, NPS and USPP. Active and committed leadership at all three levels is essential for the Panel's recommendations to be effectively realized."*

The report's conclusions and recommendations are not surprising. Indeed, U.S. Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers stated last December that protecting federal land in the post 9/11 environment required more resources than had been allocated to the Park Police in the past.

To most observers, Chief Chamber's comments were a statement of the obvious and helpful to Congress in carrying out its oversight and budget responsibilities. However, Chief Chambers was placed on administrative leave in December and formally fired as Park Police chief in July for drawing attention to the need for more resources. She is wisely contesting her removal. Insofar as the findings and recommendations in the report echo several of Chief Chamber's observations, it would appear the grounds for her removal were far more tenuous and insubstantial than has been claimed and demand to be critically reexamined.

It is my expectation that the Interior Department, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Park Police will carefully review this important report and immediately correct deficiencies in its personnel and administrative policies. The report strengthens the conviction shared by many that Chief Chambers was removed from her post for reasons that had nothing to do with competence, but because she dared to tell the truth about an important security matter.

The American people deserve the assurance that their national parks and monuments are being protected by outstanding law enforcements professionals equipped with the resources to do their job. Unfortunately, developments at USPP over the past year point to a leadership crisis and a need for more resources that must be corrected immediately. More fundamentally, it would appear that the Department, NPS, and USPP need to be more candid about the future of USPP.

Thank you for your attention and with kindest regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Steny H. Hoyer

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