

chatterbox**Gagging the Fuzz, Part 5**

Shutting Teresa Chambers's pie-hole, again.

By Timothy Noah

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And now, students, a bonus exam question to bring this spring term to a close here at the Kennedy School of Government. Imagine you are a federal agency manager in the Bush administration and an employee you've been trying to fire says on radio and television that your well-publicized harassment of her may have a chilling effect on other government whistle-blowers. Do you:

- a) Halt the mistreatment and apologize;
 - b) Tell your employee that you disagree with what she says but would defend to the death her right to say it;
 - c) Resign in disgrace;
- or*
- d) Shut her up.

The answer, of course, is d), as the latest twist in the saga of Teresa Chambers plainly demonstrates. Chambers is the Park Police chief who was [canned](#) for [answering questions](#) posed to her by the *Washington Post* about the shortage of Park Police manpower to perform its duties, which expanded after 9/11. She has challenged the firing, and it's currently undergoing [administrative review](#). Chambers was initially under a gag order, but in late February the Interior Department (of which the Park Police is a unit) [agreed to lift it](#). But Interior was not pleased with various interviews Chambers subsequently granted, including chats with [Fox News](#) and [National Public Radio](#) in which Chambers stated (to quote the NPR interview),

[T]here's another issue that's developed out of this that does concern me, and that is that federal employees all over have now gotten this fear inside of them about speaking out. In fact, I saw an article the other day where a spokesperson herself wouldn't give her name. And my guess is that it's the fear over having an action similar to what has occurred to me.

As any political appointee in the Bush administration will tell you, it is simply bad management to allow a government employee to go around making the unfounded and irresponsible accusation that other government employees are being intimidated into silence. Such people need to be dealt with firmly, so they can be an example to others. That is precisely what Interior did. On April 13, it sent Chambers' lawyer a [letter](#) stating that Chambers was to grant no further interviews unless she received advance permission from Donald Murphy, deputy director of the National Park Service, or Fran Mainella, director of the National Park Service. The letter further stated that she should keep her big yap shut about President Bush's budget request for fiscal year 2005. Now let's hear no more of this scurrilous nonsense about federal employees being too frightened to speak out.

Teresa Chambers Archive:

March 25, 2004: "[Gagging the Fuzz, Part 4](#)"

Feb. 19, 2004: "[Gagging the Fuzz, Part 3](#)"

Jan. 12, 2004: "[Gagging the Fuzz, Part 2](#)"

Dec. 30, 2003: "[Gagging the Fuzz](#)"

*Timothy Noah writes "Chatterbox" for **Slate**.*

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