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When being right doesn't count

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In December, the chief of the U.S. Park Police, Teresa Chambers, remarked rather casually in an interview with *The Washington Post* that her department, which protects the capital's monuments and federal parkways, was undermanned and underfunded to meet its new post-9/11 duties.

This was glaringly obvious to Washington residents who were seeing a lot more Park Police on the National Mall and a lot fewer on the highways.

It might have been glaringly obvious to Chambers' superiors at the Interior Department, but the chief had made the unforgivable error of contradicting the Bush administration line that all was hunky-dory on the security front and that the last thing needed was more government employees and money.

Chambers was promptly put on administrative leave and sat at home until July, when she was fired.

As it happens, Parks, a former chief of the Durham, N.C., police and a long-serving officer in the capital suburbs, had been brought aboard by Interior specifically to improve poor morale in the force because of low pay and poor promotion prospects.

Now a congressionally commissioned report has concluded that Chambers was right. The respected National Academy of Public Administration said that, given its expanded duties, the U.S. Park Police "cannot be an effective guardian of urban national parks and also a full-service urban police force without a substantial increase in resources."

But then Chambers wasn't fired for being right. Like Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, she was fired for being what the White House calls "off message."