



Tell-a-Friend

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Protecting Employees Who Protect Our Environment



News Releases

For Immediate Release: June 28, 2005

Contact: Jeff Ruch (202) 265-7337

NATIONAL ICON SECURITY FUNDING NOT TIED TO THREAT LEVEL — New GAO Report Echoes Warnings by U.S. Park Police Chief Chambers

Washington, DC — In a new report, the Government Accountability Office validated many of the concerns raised by former U.S. Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers for which she was ultimately fired one year ago. GAO found that the security, resource and planning limitations that Chief Chambers addressed in 2003 have not improved, according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

In the report, entitled “Actions Needed to Better Protect National Icons and Federal Office Buildings from Terrorism” and issued earlier this week, GAO found that –

- National Park Service “law enforcement staff is already spread thin,” with officers having to leave “their permanent parks to supplement the icon park forces, leaving many other parks with a diminished protection;”
- The Department of Interior, the parent agency for the Park Service, lacks a plan for linking threat level to requested funding, thus Interior remains incapable of prioritizing the security trade-offs that it must make; and
- Interior lacks a transparent decision-making process that allows the public, Congress and other agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security, to realistically assess its needs.

Firing Chief Chambers for her public comments certainly did not enhance Interior’s decision-making transparency. Significantly, GAO found top agency officials reflecting the same doubts expressed by former Chief Chambers about “whether the department will have a sustained level of staff and funding resources for security initiatives” and “about their ability to implement further security enhancements that they believe are needed.”

“This latest GAO report is déjà vu all over again,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, noting that the U.S. Park Police has fewer sworn officers that it did on September 11, 2001. “If Interior insists on shooting the messengers, as it did with Chief Chambers, it will never hear the message.”

While GAO noted that there had been improvements in Interior’s performance since the September 11th attacks, those improvements were last chronicled in 2002 under Chief Chambers’ watch. Although GAO

transmitted its recommendations for improvement to Interior for their review, the report concludes that, “Interior did not comment on [GAO’s] conclusions and recommendations.”

###