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## Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

*Protecting Employees Who Protect Our Environment*



### News Releases

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#### **U.S. PARK POLICE CHIEF JOB VACANT AGAIN** — Latest Resignation Punctuates Ongoing Turmoil, Shortages and Political Interference

Washington, DC — The U.S. Department of Interior is now accepting applicants to serve as Chief of the U.S. Park Police. Earlier this month, Dwight Pettiford quietly resigned from the position approximately seven months after being relieved of his duties in the aftermath of a critical report on National Mall security, according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

Interior is accepting applications until November 5th, the day after the presidential election, and apparently intends to re-fill the position before President Bush leaves office.

In 2004, the Bush administration terminated a previous U.S. Park Police Chief, Teresa Chambers, whom it selected following a nationwide search, in response to an interview she gave to The Washington Post on staff shortages. Earlier this year, Chambers, now a police chief in suburban Maryland, won a federal appeal court decision challenging her removal as illegal and unwarranted. Her case was remanded back for further litigation which is still pending.

Ironically, her successor, Dwight Pettiford was also removed from his duties in March following remarks he made to the Post in an article about deficits in security on the National Mall (saying “They’re still standing” when asked about safety of the monuments). The current job announcement lists “the ability to promote good public relations skills” as a key qualification.

“The problem lies with the Bush administration officials making these decisions, not the law enforcement professionals who have had the misfortune to serve under them,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, whose organization has represented Chief Chambers in her long legal fight. “This critical vacancy should be left for the next President and Interior Secretary to fill.”

The Chief of the U.S. Park Police is one of the nation’s top law enforcement jobs, overseeing the oldest federal constabulary. The U.S. Park Police is responsible for protecting the National Mall, the Statute of Liberty, scores of parks in the District of Columbia, five major parkways and various other sites from the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to the Wolf Trap Center for Performing Arts in Northern Virginia. Numerous reports have stressed the need to strengthen its capacity and to prioritize its far-flung functions.

In February 2008, the Interior Department Office of Inspector General released a scathing report about breakdowns in security on the National Mall. In early March, Pettiford was reassigned to write a response to the Inspector General evaluation. Reportedly, Chief Pettiford promptly went on personal leave and remained there. U.S. Park Police officers were verbally informed last week that Pettiford has accepted a security-related position with Interior. No response to the Inspector General report was ever issued.

In the interim, Park Police force levels have dropped to the lowest levels in more than 20 years, and force morale has plummeted. Gaping shortfalls cannot be closed because budget support for the Park Police is frozen under a continuing resolution that sets funding levels for domestic agencies through March 2009.

“The Interior Department could restore Teresa Chambers as Chief of the U.S. Park Police with the stroke of a pen,” Ruch added. “If this Secretary will not act to restore sanity to the Park Police, we are hopeful that the next one will.”

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