

Teresa Chambers 'stunned' by reinstatement

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By Ed O'Keefe

A month from now, **Teresa C. Chambers** could be back on the job patrolling national park sites across the Washington region as chief of the U.S. Park Police, almost eight years after [warning The Washington Post](#) that staff shortages at her federal policy agency could impact visitor safety.

Citing weak evidence against her, the federal Merit Systems Protection Board [ordered the Park Police Tuesday](#) to reinstate her within 20 days. She is also entitled to back pay dating back to July 2004 and reimbursement for legal fees.

The Federal Eye spoke with Chambers Tuesday evening, shortly after she learned of the decision. A transcript of the conversation, edited for length, appears below:

Question: What do you make of the decision?

Answer: "It's a myriad of emotions. I find myself in stunned silence as I try to absorb what happened today. It's a day we've worked for so long and now that it's here I'm not sure what emotion to feel. Obviously very grateful that the day of justice has finally arrived."

Why did you hold out for so long?

"I wasn't holding out. The goal from the start was to return to the job that I loved, the job I competed and was hired for and to make sure justice prevailed, not just for me, but this is precedent-setting to other civil servants, other federal employees. One of the questions has been can a federal employee be fired for telling the truth, and this case will lay the groundwork for the future."

What about your current job as chief of the Riverdale, Md. police. Will you resign?

"When Mayor [\[Vernon\] Archer](#) hired me three years ago, he knew my case was pending at several levels and knew that someday this day might come. We'll take it a step at a time. I look forward to talking to folks at the Department of the Interior. ... I'm not certain how any of this works."

Will you quit your current job and go back to the Park Police when they offer you back your old job?

"Of course. That's what we've wanted from the start. I look forward to the day I can return to the United States Park Police."

What would you say to other federal employees or whistleblowers of any kind who are in a situation similar to yours?

"I didn't wake up one morning and decided to be a whistleblower. I went about my job every day, trying to live up to the ethics of a police chief, to be candid and to be supportive of my bosses, but also to look out for the safety and welfare of people who visited our parks and parkways, to make certain that those iconic statues are there for generations to come.

"I didn't seek to blow the whistle and do something untoward, in fact I thought my bosses would be quite supportive. I'm still stunned that a reaction back in 2003 occurred the way it did. I thought police officials in municipalities are expected to be truthful and candid and that our bosses wouldn't tolerate anything less. It troubles me that, I guess I was expected to be less than honest.

"That's behind us now and I hope people have the courage to speak the truth, or to make a decision that maybe the job that they're in isn't for them if they're expected to be less than truthful."

Have you heard from other whistleblowers over the course of this?

"Oh my goodness yes, and if you go to HonestChief.com there are thousands and thousands of people from around the world, many of whom are whistleblowers, who haven't had the exposure that my case has had because they were behind the scenes employees. I know this is a welcome day for all of them."

Does it bother you that the Obama administration kept this up? Your lawyers seem puzzled that it had continued.

"Puzzled is a really good word to describe that. Disappointed is another. I had hoped that there would be a quicker, easier resolution once a new administration came in.

"But everything happens for a reason. A compromise or the executive branch stepping in and fixing this wouldn't have had the long-reaching positive impact of a court decision, in this case several court decision and a Merit Systems Protection Board decision. that's going to be more positive for the greater good.

"It was a long fight, and it wasn't easy. And fortunately with a loving husband who put every ounce of his being into it, it came to fruition today. I'm still stunned, I'm not sure what to feel after so many years."