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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1103

December 15, 2003

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Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary, Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

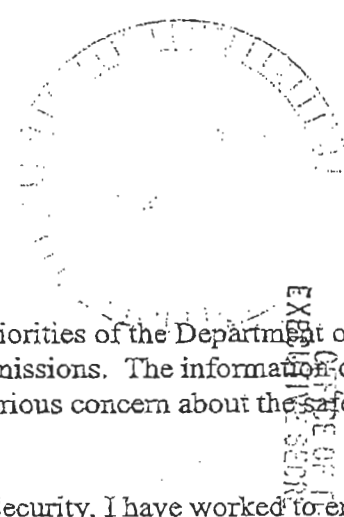
Dear Secretary Norton:

I am writing to express my concern over budgetary priorities of the Department of Interior and its impact on traditional non-homeland security missions. The information cited by U.S. Park Police (USPP) Chief Teresa Chambers raises serious concern about the safety of our national parks and parkways.

Since the inception of the Department of Homeland Security, I have worked to ensure that the cost of creating the Department will not come at the expense of essential non-homeland security missions. This cannot be allowed to happen. Agencies should strike the proper balance between new homeland security responsibilities and their critical existing non-homeland security missions. Enhancing traditional missions also enhances domestic security which depends on sound management strategies that ensure adequate resources and personnel. I believe that federal agencies government-wide must make it a top priority to fulfill the essential non-homeland security functions and missions Americans rely upon every day.

At the request of Congress, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) conducted a review of the U.S. Park Police's mission, budget, staffing, and other functions. The 2001 NAPA report raised concerns about budget accountability, management issues, and overtime. The report also recommended that the Secretary and the Director of the National Park Service (NPS) clarify and streamline the mission, responsibilities, and priorities of the U.S. Park Police. I understand that the Department of the Interior and the NPS have not responded to these recommendations. In addition, a survey conducted by the U.S. Secret Service, and endorsed by the Department of Homeland Security, prompted the Department of the Interior to adopt rules requiring additional protection around federal monuments. These new requirements, plus a new post at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, may make it difficult for the USPP to maintain non-homeland security functions.

Given my longstanding concern on this issue, I was particularly troubled to learn that Chief Chambers was relieved of her post when she discussed budget shortfalls and staffing issues. As the ranking member of both the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks and the Subcommittee on Financial Management, the Budget, and International Security, which has jurisdiction over prohibited personnel actions, I would like to know what the missions, responsibilities, and priorities are for the USPP and if the survey conducted by the U.S. Secret Service, which precipitated the rule change at the monuments, took into consideration the



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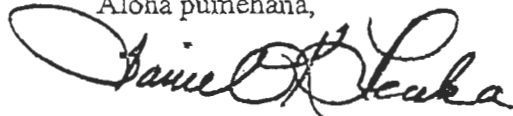
request by Congress to streamline and clarify the USPP's mission and responsibilities. Furthermore, I would like to know how the Department intends to fulfill its non-homeland security missions and functions in light of this change, including the budget, number of employees, resources, and strategy used to carry out the core functions of the U.S. Park Police.

Moreover, as the author of S. 1358, the Federal Employee Protection of Disclosures Act, I am interested in the rationale for the suspension of Chief Chambers, who brought her concerns to the public's attention. Press accounts indicate that the suspension was taken because Chief Chambers' disclosure broke either agency or federal rules, and I would greatly appreciate your providing me with pertinent sections of the Department's rules that Chief Chambers has allegedly violated.

Whistleblowers play a crucial role in alerting Congress and the public to serious cases of government wrongdoing and mismanagement, as well as serious threats to public safety and health. Given the rising threat facing Americans at our national parks and parkways as a result of this change, the personnel action against Chief Chambers sends a terrible signal to other federal law enforcement officers that they should not disclose evidence of government abuse, waste, mismanagement, or threats to public health and safety. It is critical that Congress and the public know of problems, and I urge you to protect employees who come forward with similar disclosures.

Thank you for your prompt response to this request. I look forward to working with you to resolve this important matter.

Aloha pumehana,



DANIEL K. AKAKA
U.S. Senator