



Former Park Police chief to resume duties January 31

By the CNN Wire Staff

January 21, 2011 8:54 p.m. EST

Washington (CNN) -- Seven years after the federal government fired her as chief of the U.S. Park Police, Teresa Chambers is set to resume the role on January 31, the Department of the Interior announced Friday.

Earlier this month, a merit system appeals panel ordered Chambers' reinstatement after ruling she had been wrongly dismissed for complaining about budget cuts in an interview with the Washington Post and with congressional staffers.

But the Interior Department downplayed the news of Chambers' reinstatement in a press release announcing that the current chief, Sal Lauro, would take a post as a "senior adviser" in the department on January 31.

"Sal Lauro is a tremendous asset to the Department and I appreciate his willingness to continue to play a leadership role in our law enforcement programs," Secretary Ken Salazar said in the release. "He exemplifies the professionalism and dedication of our strong and proud Park Police force."

After a list of Lauro's accomplishments, the release noted that Salazar announced "that the final order of the Merit Systems Protection Board concerning Teresa Chambers will be implemented on January 31."

"Chief Lauro has led the Park Police on a positive and ambitious agenda over the last two years," said Salazar, "and I look forward to Teresa Chambers continuing to advance that agenda."

The release did not mention that Chambers, 53, would be chief of the Park Police.

"It is a tremendous honor to return to the United States Park Police and to work alongside the men and women of that organization who have the privilege of serving the law enforcement profession while also serving our country," the release quoted Chambers as saying. "Each day, as part of the National Park Service, these officers,

along with law enforcement rangers, walk through the pages of history as they protect and secure our national monuments and parks and those who visit them."

The merit board issued its ruling January 11, ordering that Chambers be reinstated within 20 days and with back pay, interest and attorneys fees.

The U.S. Park Police falls under the National Park Service and protects public lands in Washington, D.C., New York and San Francisco. It is most prominent in Washington, where Park Police officers patrol the National Mall and numerous monuments.

Chambers's dismissal was the result of the 2003 interview with the Washington Post in which she argued the department needed an additional \$8 million to fulfill its mission of protecting iconic monuments. On the day the article was published, the deputy director of the National Park Service, Donald Murphy, sent Chambers an e-mail instructing her not to grant any more interviews without approval.

Two days later, Murphy placed Chambers on administrative leave and proposed her firing on six grounds, all relating to Chambers's statements about the budget. She was fired seven months later -- just two and half hours after her attorneys filed a demand for immediate reinstatement through the Merit Systems Protection Board.

A public interest group called PEER -- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility -- championed her cause, casting her as a dedicated public servant who was fired for making comments protected by federal whistleblower statutes.

Four years after Chambers' dismissal, an Interior Department inspector general's report said that the Park Police force was understaffed, under-equipped, under-trained and demoralized. The report said the force was torn between acting as an urban police department and protecting national icons, and consequently "has failed to adequately perform either mission."

Many terrorism experts say the national icons are prime terrorist targets because of their enormous symbolic value and their location at population centers. But, the report said, while [Park Police](#) officials state that icon protection is a priority, "their actions indicate otherwise." An assistant chief, the report said, justified the department's failure to meet even minimum force requirements at several monuments "by stating that terrorists are not incredibly sophisticated people."