

**DESECRATING OLD GLORY:  
INVESTIGATING HOW THE PRO-HAMAS  
PROTESTS TURNED NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE LAND INTO A VIOLENT DISGRACE**

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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Tuesday, December 10, 2024

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## CONTENTS

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|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Hearing Memo .....  | v    |
| Hearing held on Tuesday, December 10, 2024 .....  | 1    |
| Statement of Members:   |      |
| Westerman, Hon. Bruce, a Representative in Congress from the State of Arkansas .....  | 2    |
| Gosar, Hon. Paul, a Representative in Congress from the State of Arizona .....  | 3    |
| Stansbury, Hon. Melanie A., a Representative in Congress from the State of New Mexico .....   | 4    |
| Statement of Witnesses:   |      |
| Panel I:  |      |
| Greenblatt, Hon. Mark, Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC .....   | 6    |
| Prepared statement of .....   | 8    |
| Questions submitted for the record .....  | 18   |
| Cuvelier, Charles, Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC .....                | 19   |
| Prepared statement of .....   | 21   |
| Questions submitted for the record .....  | 23   |
| Panel II:   |      |
| Spencer, Kenneth, Chairman, United States Park Police, Fraternal Order of Police, Washington, DC .....  | 44   |
| Prepared statement of .....   | 46   |
| Questions submitted for the record .....  | 49   |
| Goldenberg, Alex, Director of Intelligence, Network Contagion Research Institute, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina .....  | 50   |
| Prepared statement of .....   | 52   |
| Questions submitted for the record .....  | 54   |
| Walter, Scott, President, Capital Research Center, Washington, DC .....   | 55   |
| Prepared statement of .....   | 56   |
| Questions submitted for the record .....  | 60   |
| Additional Materials Submitted for the Record:  |      |
| Submissions for the Record by Representative Westerman<br>Capital Research Center, “Marching Toward Violence” .....   | 69   |
| Submissions for the Record by Representative Stauber<br>Government Executive, “National Park Service’s IRA hiring surge could fail ahead of funding deadline” ..... | 38   |





HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

**To:** House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members

**From:** Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations staff, Michelle Lane (Michelle.Lane@mail.house.gov) and Lucas Drill (Lucas.Drill@mail.house.gov) x52761

**Date:** Tuesday, December 10, 2024

**Subject:** Oversight Hearing on “Desecrating Old Glory: Investigating How the Pro-Hamas Protests Turned National Park Service Land into a Violent Disgrace”

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The House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold an oversight hearing titled “*Desecrating Old Glory: Investigating How the Pro-Hamas Protests Turned National Park Service Land into a Violent Disgrace*” on **December 10, 2024, at 10:15 a.m. in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Cross Thompson (Cross.Thompson@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, December 9, 2024, if their member intends to participate in the hearing.

#### **I. KEY MESSAGES**

- On July 24, 2024, the ANSWER Coalition led a large public protest that quickly devolved into a riot on National Park Service lands in the Union Station area of Washington, D.C.
- During this specific protest, the ANSWER Coalition and riot participants broke almost every rule of their public gathering permit, which resulted in the permit being revoked. The riot involved burning American flags, assaulting police officers, and raising foreign flags on American soil.
- ANSWER Coalition has been involved in protests across the United States, including those targeting college campuses and infrastructure as part of the broader “Shut it Down for Palestine” movement.
- Concerningly, these groups and their affiliates not only destroy property and cause violence on campuses and federal lands, but also have ties to adversarial foreign organizations like Hamas and the Chinese Communist Party.

#### **II. WITNESSES**

##### **Panel I:**

- **The Hon. Mark Lee Greenblatt**, Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.
- **Mr. Charles Cuvelier**, Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

**Panel II:**

- **Mr. Kenneth H. Spencer, III**, Chairman, United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police, Washington, D.C.
- **Mr. Alex Goldenberg**, Director of Intelligence, Network Contagion Research Institute, Mount Pleasant, SC
- **Mr. Scott Walter**, President, Capital Research Center, Washington, D.C.

**III. INTRODUCTION**

As the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel has been a staunch ally of the United States since its establishment. In fact, the United States was the first country to recognize Israel as an independent nation in 1948.<sup>1</sup>

On May 31, 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was invited to address a bipartisan, bicameral joint meeting of Congress.<sup>2</sup> The invitation was meant to give Prime Minister Netanyahu an opportunity “to share the Israeli government’s vision for defending democracy, combatting terror, and establishing a just and lasting peace in the region”<sup>3</sup> after Hamas—a Palestinian terrorist organization—savagely invaded Israel and murdered civilians there on October 7, 2023. Plans for Prime Minister Netanyahu’s speech were met with plans for anti-Israel protests.

Even before Congress formally invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to speak, leftist activists and lawmakers labeled him a war criminal and called for his arrest for leading his nation’s defensive military effort against Hamas.<sup>4</sup> On July 23, 2024, the National Park Service (NPS) granted a public gathering permit to the ANSWER Coalition (ANSWER)—a radical anti-Israel organization also known as Act Now to Stop War and End Racism—to hold a protest to “Stop the genocide in Gaza.”<sup>5</sup>

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR PERMIT**

ANSWER Coalition’s public gathering was approved to take place on July 24, 2024, at Columbus Plaza; John Marshall Park; Pennsylvania Avenue North Sidewalk, 3rd–5th Street; and Pennsylvania Avenue South Sidewalk, 3rd–5th Street.<sup>6</sup> ANSWER anticipated that more than 5,000 participants would attend the protest, and the permit enabled them to demonstrate from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m.<sup>7</sup>

The NPS permit made clear that its approval was subject to two conditions.<sup>8</sup> First, ANSWER and the protest’s participants had to comply with every written condition and regulation attached to the permit and with any reasonable directions of the United States Park Police (USPP) on the day of the event.<sup>9</sup> Second, ANSWER and its protestors could not obstruct any sidewalks, walkways, or roadways.<sup>10</sup> NPS reserved the right to revoke ANSWER’s permit immediately and at any time if “it reasonably appear[ed] that the public gathering presents clear and present danger

<sup>1</sup> See Office of the Spokesperson, *U.S. Relations with Israel*, U.S. DEPT. OF STATE (Jan. 30, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-israel-2/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Patricia Zengerle, *Israel’s Netanyahu gets invitation to address US Congress*, REUTERS (May 31, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-congressional-leaders-invite-netanyahu-address-joint-meeting-congress-2024-05-31/>.

<sup>3</sup> See Press Release, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, Congressional Leaders Invite Israeli PM Netanyahu to Address Joint Meeting of Congress (May 31, 2024), <https://www.speaker.gov/2024/05/31/congressional-leaders-invite-israeli-pm-netanyahu-to-address-joint-meeting-of-congress/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Giselle Ruhyyih Ewing, *Netanyahu accepts Congress’ invitation to speak despite blowback*, POLITICO (June 1, 2024), <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/06/01/netanyahu-congress-address-00161153>; Emanuel Fabian and Gianluca Pacchiani, *IDF estimates 3,000 Hamas terrorists invaded Israel in Oct. 7 onslaught*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-estimates-3000-hamas-terrorists-invaded-israel-in-oct-7-onslaught/>; Stuart Winer, *Hamas actions are war crimes, could constitute genocide-international law experts*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Oct. 15, 2023), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-actions-are-war-crimes-could-constitute-genocide-international-law-experts/>.

<sup>5</sup> See U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Public Gathering Permit NCA-NAMA-EVNT24-1278, Issued to ANSWER Coalition on July 23, 2023, for July 24, 2023, on file with the Committee.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*; see also Scott Streater, *Republicans want NPS probe of anti-Netanyahu protest*, E&E NEWS (July 30, 2024), <https://www.eenews.net/articles/republicans-want-nps-probe-of-anti-netanyahu-protest/>.

<sup>9</sup> See U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Public Gathering Permit NCA-NAMA-EVNT24-1278, Issued to ANSWER Coalition on July 23, 2023, for July 24, 2023, on file with the Committee.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

to public safety, good order or health, or if any conditions of [the] permit are violated.”<sup>11</sup> NPS previously granted similar public gathering permits to the ANSWER Coalition, so ANSWER was undoubtedly familiar with these conditions.<sup>12</sup>

ANSWER’s planned protest quickly devolved into a riot as the organization either lost control of its crowd or instigated violations of the permit and the law. Protesters disrupted traffic near the Capitol Complex and along Pennsylvania Avenue,<sup>13</sup> and buses around Union Station stopped service.<sup>14</sup> At Union Station, the rioters turned violent as they deliberately and maliciously defaced and destroyed federal property. Rioters tore down the American flag, burned the flag,<sup>15</sup> and replaced the American flag with a Palestinian flag.<sup>16</sup> Rioters defaced the Columbus Plaza monument and the replica Liberty Bell with pro-Hamas graffiti.<sup>17</sup> Rioters set fire to an effigy of Prime Minister Netanyahu outside of Union Station.<sup>18</sup> This illegal activity was captured through photographs and videos, which were widely shared and reported.



Chairman Westerman views the damage at Union Station.  
Source: Committee on Natural Resources

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Matt Pusatory and Jordan Fischer, *Thousands turn out for ‘Free Palestine’ rally near White House*, WUSA9 (Nov. 4, 2023), <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/dc-free-palestine-rally-plans/65-b565f86d-3d17-4320-83b9-6843c0f321c7>.

<sup>13</sup> See Laura Wainman et al., *23 arrests after thousands protest Netanyahu’s speech to Congress*, WUSA9 (July 25, 2024), <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/protests/protesters-on-capitol-hill-israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-speech-to-congress-live-updates/65-fe99a9ae-36af-49f7-9e0f-0fd16e2c9b29>.

<sup>14</sup> See Amber Anderson, *Buses currently not running to, from Union Station due to protests over Netanyahu Congressional speech*, WUSA9 (July 24, 2024), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/buses-currently-not-running-to-from-union-station-due-to-protests-over-netanyahu-congressional-speech/ar-BB1qzoQ?ocid=BingNewsVerp>.

<sup>15</sup> See Moon, *Video: Pro-Palestinian Protesters Burn U.S. Flag Outside Union Station in Washington, D.C.*, CEDAR NEWS (July 25, 2024), <https://cedarnews.net/newstasks/739699/video-pro-palestinian-protesters-burn-u-s-flag-outside-union-station-in-washington-d-c/>.

<sup>16</sup> See Andrea Swalec, *‘What happened at Union Station was vile’: DC protest vandalism, flag-burning condemned*, NBC WASHINGTON (July 26, 2024), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/what-happened-at-union-station-was-vile-dc-protest-vandalism-flag-burning-condemned/ar-BB1qCwIs?ocid=BingNewsSerp>.

<sup>17</sup> See Rebecca Turco, *Some faded graffiti remains outside Union Station following protests*, WJLA—WASHINGTON D.C. (July 28, 2024), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/some-faded-graffiti-remains-outside-union-station-following-protests/ar-BB1qMIwZ?ocid=BingNewsVerp>.

<sup>18</sup> See Chad De Guzman et al., *Pro-Palestinian Protesters Burn American Flags and Deface Monuments Amid Clashes With Police in D.C.*, TIME (July 25, 2024), <https://time.com/7003081/photos-netanyahu-washington-dc-protests-demonstrations-police-clashes-arrests-capitol/>.

These criminal actions required USPP, Capitol Police (USCP), Metropolitan Police (MPD), and New York Police Department (NYPD) officers to act jointly to control the crowd. Because of the crowd's violence, law enforcement officers were forced to use pepper spray<sup>19</sup> and make arrests. At 3:17 p.m., because of the growing violence and destruction at Union Station, NPS officially revoked ANSWER's permit and ordered the rioters to disperse.<sup>20</sup> The ANSWER Coalition violated—and encouraged others to violate—nearly every permit provision.

Predictably, demonstrators continued to violate the permit's provisions even after it was revoked. ANSWER Coalition's violations—including assaults on federal officers, destruction of federal property, and resisting arrest—were serious enough to warrant the USPP contacting the Committee contemporaneously.<sup>21</sup>

The NPS-issued public gathering permit imposes basic but serious requirements on ANSWER Coalition as the permittee. The permit requires that “[t]he area should be left in substantially the same condition as it was prior to the activities authorized herein.” More specifically, the permit makes clear that the “[p]ermittee will be responsible for any injury to, loss of, or damage to federal owned or controlled lands, waters, or resources (natural or cultural resources or facilities) resulting from [p]ermittee's activities under this permit, 18 USC § 1361.”<sup>22</sup> 18 USC § 1361 provides for punishment in the form of both fines and imprisonment. Additionally, the permit states that the permittee, its agents, and its representatives may be held liable for any costs and damages associated with any injury or damage to NPS resources under 54 USC §§ 100721–100725.<sup>23</sup> To ensure that there is no confusion, other permit provisions prohibit “the alteration, damage, or removal of park resources or facilities”; attachment of any items—including signs and banners—to any landscape elements; and climbing, removing, or injuring any “statue seat, wall, fountain, light poles, elevator towers, or other erection or architectural feature, or any tree, shrub, or landscaping features.”<sup>24</sup> The National Park Service, following a recent arrest of a suspect involved in the protest, estimated the cost to repair and clean the graffiti alone at over \$11,000.<sup>25</sup>

The Committee is steadfast in its belief that given ANSWER's misuse and abuse of the permit it was granted, the organization, its named officers on the permit,<sup>26</sup> and any protestors who broke the law must be held accountable according to the terms of the permit.<sup>27</sup> The Committee also has questions regarding NPS' permit-issuing process and the mechanisms in place to enforce permit terms when violations occur.

#### **ANSWER COALITION'S PARTNERS AND DUBIOUS ANTI-ISRAEL FUNDING**

Before ANSWER's July public gathering permit was approved by NPS, ANSWER Coalition and the People's Forum began advertising on social media a “National Mobilization” effort to “Surround the Capitol” and “Arrest Netanyahu” in conjunction with the planned joint session of Congress.<sup>28</sup> The People's Forum describes itself as “a movement incubator for working class and marginalized communities to

<sup>19</sup> See Brianna Herlihy, *Park Police union says officers 'did everything they could' during DC anti-Israel riot*, FOX News (July 26, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/park-police-union-says-officers-did-everything-could-during-dc-anti-israel-riot>.

<sup>20</sup> See Brady Knox, *Protesters burn American flag at Union Station and raise Palestinian one in its place*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (July 24, 2024), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/news/content/ar-BB1qzmv0#:~:text=At%203%3A17%20p.m.%2C%20the%20United%20States%20Park%20Police,and%20everyone%20was%20ordered%20to%20leave%20the%20area>.

<sup>21</sup> Personal communications with USPP on file with Committee Staff.

<sup>22</sup> See U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Public Gathering Permit NCA-NAMA-EVNT24-1278, Issued to ANSWER Coalition on July 23, 2023, for July 24, 2023, on file with the Committee.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> See *Towson woman allegedly vandalized D.C. property during Israeli Prime Minister protests*, CBS NEWS (Updated September 14, 2024) <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/towson-woman-allegedly-vandalized-d-c-property-during-israeli-prime-minister-protests/>

<sup>26</sup> Although the permit was issued to the ANSWER Coalition, the permit listed specific responsible parties as persons in charge and on-site contacts. Brian Becker, ANSWER's national coordinator who is also an organizer for the Party for Socialism and Liberation, is listed as the person in charge. Layan Fuleihan, Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, and Carl Messineo are listed as on-site contacts.

<sup>27</sup> See U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Public Gathering Permit NCA-NAMA-EVNT24-1278, Issued to ANSWER Coalition on July 23, 2023, for July 24, 2023, on file with the Committee.

<sup>28</sup> See The People's Forum (@PeoplesForumNYC), X (June 26, 2024, 7:10 PM), <https://x.com/PeoplesForumNYC/status/1806102026406760901> (asking people to “Get on the Bus from NYC”).



build unity across the historic lines of division at home and abroad.”<sup>29</sup> However, this socialist organization has direct ties to the ongoing antisemitic anti-Israel campus protests of 2024, and—perhaps more alarmingly—has received large grants from major charities due to its status as a 501(c)(3) organization.<sup>30</sup>



Protestors cheer while our flag is burned.

Source: TIME. <https://time.com/7003081/photos-netanyahu-washington-dc-protests-demonstrations-police-clashes-arrests-capitol/>

Although ANSWER’s name was on the NPS permit, the ANSWER Coalition’s activities on July 24, 2024, were part of a broader “Shut it Down for Palestine” movement whose membership roster reads as a who’s who of radical leftist anti-Israel organizations.<sup>31</sup> At least 17 Shut it Down for Palestine-connected organizations were listed as partner groups for ANSWER’s planned July 24 protests.<sup>32</sup>

ANSWER Coalition and its partner organizations involved in the July 24, 2024, protests have ties to funds that can be traced to Hamas and Iran. For example, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) founder Hatem Bazian raised money for KindHearts, which was investigated and had its assets frozen due to its coordination with Hamas and Hamas officials.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the Biden-Harris White House acknowledges that Iran is involved in funding U.S.-based activist organizations and protests.<sup>34</sup> These Iran and Hamas-

<sup>29</sup> About, THE PEOPLE’S FORUM, <https://peoplesforum.org/about/#mission>.

<sup>30</sup> See Joseph Simonson, *Anti-Israel Group Encouraged Columbia Protestors to Re-Create ‘The Summer of 2020’ Hours Before Students Stormed a Building*, THE WASHINGTON FREE BEACON (May 1, 2024), <https://freebeacon.com/campus/anti-israel-group-encouraged-columbia-protesters-to-recreate-the-summer-of-2020-hours-before-students-stormed-a-building/>.

<sup>31</sup> See *July 24 Arrest Netanyahu! Surround Congress with the People’s Red Line*, THE PEOPLE’S FORUM, <https://secure.givelively.org/donate/peoples-forum-inc/july-24-arrest-netanyahu-surround-congress-with-the-peoples-red-line> (linked directly from Shut it Down for Palestine’s “Donate Here!” website button, <https://www.shutitdown4palestine.org/about>); see also *About, SHUT IT DOWN FOR PALESTINE*, <https://www.shutitdown4palestine.org/about> (listing Palestinian Youth Movement, National Students for Justice in Palestine, ANSWER Coalition, The People’s Forum, International Peoples’ Assembly, Al-Awda—NY, and Palestinian American Community Center (PACC)—NJ as founding organizations).

<sup>32</sup> A poster for ANSWER’s event was previously publicly available and advertised 17 partner organizations, including The People’s Forum and Code Pink. The poster asked viewers to “endorse” the July 24 protests through a link to a Shut it Down for Palestine-run website: [shutitdown4palestine.org/july24endorse](https://shutitdown4palestine.org/july24endorse). A screenshot of the poster is on file with the Committee. It is also important to note that the organization Jewish Voice for Peace engaged in an illegal “sit-in” demonstration the day before ANSWER’s planned protest under the Cannon House Office Building’s Rotunda, during which 200 demonstrators were arrested. See Ayana, *About 200 people protesting Gaza war arrested in congressional building, police say*, KPBS (July 24, 2024), <https://www.kpbs.org/news/national/2024/07/24/about-200-people-protesting-gaza-war-arrested-in-congressional-building-police-say>.

<sup>33</sup> See *Id.*; see also Press Release, U.S. Dept. of Treasury, Treasury Freezes Assets of Organization Tied to Hamas (February 19, 2006) <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/j4058>.

<sup>34</sup> Press Briefing, Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby (July 25, 2024), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2024/07/25/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-national-security-communications-advisor-john-kirby-7/>.

backed organizations include the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and AMP,<sup>35</sup> which partnered with ANSWER to protest on July 24, 2024.<sup>36</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Shut it Down for Palestine-affiliated organizations account for the vast majority of recent anti-Israel protests—including those vandalizing federal property and disrupting university campuses—and have ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Hamas.<sup>37</sup> Concerningly, Neville Roy Singham and his wife, Code Pink founder Jodie Evans, are heavily involved in the Shut it Down for Palestine movement.<sup>38</sup> Mr. Singham and Ms. Evans are well-known for their efforts to promote radical leftist policies in the United States on behalf of China.<sup>39</sup> Mr. Singham's network, which includes CCP-connected BreakThrough Media, has been the subject of numerous public and private investigations related to foreign agency.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Mr. Singham also funds the Progress Unity Fund, which sponsors ANSWER and its activities.<sup>41</sup>

## RESPONSE TO THE RIOTS

The riots outside of Union Station were widely condemned. Fewer than 30 arrests were made related to the Union Station protests.<sup>42</sup> While these arrest numbers were criticized for being low,<sup>43</sup> the U.S. Park Police Labor Committee stresses a lack of manpower on the ground that day.<sup>44</sup> Allegedly, only 29 officers were available to control the protesters.<sup>45</sup>

In response to calls for help from law enforcement—particularly from USPP—Committee Chairman Westerman took immediate action, calling on U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Haaland to address the lack of resources available for law enforcement.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, after the protests, Chairman Westerman,<sup>47</sup> Speaker Mike Johnson, and additional Members of Congress went to Union Station to visit the site, remove foreign flags and banners, raise the American flag,<sup>48</sup> and witness the damage caused by rioters. The Committee's investigation into the protests on NPS land and DOI's response to them continue.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Lara L. Burns, *Fueling Chaos: Tracing the Flow of Tax-Exempt Dollars to Antisemitism*, Testimony before the Committee on Ways and Means (July 23, 2024), <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Burns-Testimony.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Poster with ANSWER Coalition's protest partners on file with the Committee.

<sup>37</sup> See NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE, *CONTAGIOUS DISRUPTION: HOW CCP INFLUENCE AND RADICAL IDEOLOGIES THREATEN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAMPUSES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES* (2024), [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report\\_May-2024.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report_May-2024.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> See *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> See NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE, *CONTAGIOUS DISRUPTION: HOW CCP INFLUENCE AND RADICAL IDEOLOGIES THREATEN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAMPUSES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES* (2024), [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report\\_May-2024.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report_May-2024.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> See NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE, *CONTAGIOUS DISRUPTION: HOW CCP INFLUENCE AND RADICAL IDEOLOGIES THREATEN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAMPUSES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES* (2024), [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report\\_May-2024.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/SID4P-Report_May-2024.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> See Peter Hermann et al., *Charges dropped against 11 anti-Netanyahu protesters arrested in D.C.*, THE WASHINGTON POST (July 26, 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/07/26/dc-netanyahu-protests-dropped-charges/>; Kaelan Deese, *Eight anti-Israel protesters face federal charges after DC prosecutors drop cases*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (July 26, 2024), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/justice/3101274/eight-anti-israel-protesters-face-federal-charges-dc-prosecutors-drop-cases/>; Kaelan Deese, *Anti-Israel protester charged for damaging federal property during Netanyahu visit*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Sept. 13, 2024), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/justice/3153697/anti-israel-protester-charged-damaging-federal-property-netanyahu-visit/>.

<sup>43</sup> See Brianna Herlihy, *Park Police union says officers 'did everything they could' during DC anti-Israel riot*, FOX News (July 26, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/park-police-union-says-officers-did-everything-could-during-dc-anti-israel-riot>.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> See Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, to Deb Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Dept. of the Interior (July 24, 2024), [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.07.24\\_hnr\\_ltr\\_uspp.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.07.24_hnr_ltr_uspp.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> See H. Comm. on Natural Resources (@NatResources), X (July 24, 2024, 3:53 p.m.), <https://x.com/NatResources/status/1816562453758587380>.

<sup>48</sup> See Lauren Sforza, *House Republicans restore US flags burned in DC protest: 'We righted their wrong'*, THE HILL (July 25, 2024), <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/4792204-house-republicans-raise-flags/>.

<sup>49</sup> See Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, et al. to Deb Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Dept. of the Interior and Charles Sams, Director, National Park Service (July 29, 2024), [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.07.29\\_hnr\\_haaland\\_sams\\_protest\\_investigation\\_letter.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.07.29_hnr_haaland_sams_protest_investigation_letter.pdf).

In the aftermath of the protests, USPP and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched an investigation to identify and apprehend the suspects who vandalized federal property and assaulted federal law enforcement officers.<sup>50</sup> The FBI is currently offering a reward for information leading to the identification, arrest, and conviction of these suspects, and have recently announced the arrest of one suspect in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C. (D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office).<sup>51</sup> Since the July 24 protests, the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office has charged at least three individuals who participated in the riots.<sup>52</sup>

### U.S. PARK POLICE FUNDING AND RESOURCES

The NPS manages 431 units covering over 85 million acres in all 50 U.S. states and territories.<sup>53</sup> NPS' fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget requests \$3.58 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of \$101.1 million over FY 2024 continuing resolution levels.<sup>54</sup> This will support an estimated 19,953 Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs)—an increase of 134 employees.<sup>55</sup> The USPP officers support the efforts of NPS law enforcement rangers in parks nationwide, but they primarily “provide law enforcement services to designated National Park Service sites in the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., New York City, and San Francisco.”<sup>56</sup>

Funds for USPP come from NPS' Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) account. Several subaccounts support USPP, including USPP operations, Park Visitor Protection Support Functions, Presidential Inauguration, and contributions for annuity benefit accounts. For example, the USPP Operations in Washington, D.C., were funded at \$95,012,000 for FY 2024.<sup>57</sup>

In response to the Committee's inquiries regarding the recent protest, NPS predictably blamed a lack of funding and resources for its inability to recruit, retain, and mobilize law enforcement officers.<sup>58</sup> However, in addition to ongoing funding, NPS received \$500 million to support hiring new employees through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022, only \$19 million of which the Biden-Harris administration chose to dedicate specifically to USPP recruitment.<sup>59</sup> Despite repeatedly blaming funding issues, NPS only onboarded 447 employees and spent \$21.4 million out of the \$500 million IRA funds as of May 2024, according to the Department of the Interior's Inspector General.<sup>60</sup>

A table assembled by the Congressional Research Service demonstrates USPP funding from FY 2018 through FY 2024.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See FED. BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, MOST WANTED SEEKING INFORMATION: DESTRUCTION OF FEDERAL PROPERTY AND ASSAULT OF FEDERAL OFFICERS (July 24, 2024), <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/seeking-info/destruction-of-federal-property-and-assault-of-federal-officers>.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> See United States Attorney's Office, District of Columbia: Rioter Federally Charged with Damaging U.S. Government Property at Union Station Following Rally (Sept. 13, 2024) <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/rioter-federally-charged-damaging-us-government-property-union-station-following-rally>; United States Attorney's Office, District of Columbia: Protestor Federally Charged with Damaging U.S. Government Property at Union Station (Oct. 4, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/protestor-federally-charged-damaging-us-government-property-union-station>; United States Attorney's Office, District of Columbia: Protestor Federally Charged with Assault on Officers During the July 24 Demonstration in Washington D.C. (Oct. 10, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/protestor-federally-charged-assault-officers-during-july-24-demonstration-washington-dc>.

<sup>53</sup> See *About Us*, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/faqs.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> See U.S. DEPT. OF THE INTERIOR, *Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2025 National Park Service* (2024), <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/fy2025-508-nps-greenbook.pdf>, at Overview-2.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at ONPS-59.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at Overview-65.

<sup>58</sup> September 10, 2024, response letter from Charles Sams, Director, National Park Service, on file with the Committee.

<sup>59</sup> Sean Michael Newhouse, *National Park Service's IRA hiring surge could fail ahead of funding deadline*, GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE (Aug. 16, 2024), <https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2024/08/national-park-services-ira-hiring-surge-could-fail-ahead-funding-deadline/> 398868/.

<sup>60</sup> See U.S. Dept. of the Interior Office of the Inspector General, Flash Report: The National Park Service's Inflation Reduction Act Hiring Efforts and Activities (Aug. 2024), <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/2021-migration/NPS%20Staffing%20Flash%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> FY 2018–FY 2023 data are from National Park Service budget justifications. The final appropriation for each year is shown in the budget justification for two years later (for example, the FY 2018 final appropriation is shown in the FY 2020 budget justification). The FY 2024 data, along with data on U.S. Park Police appropriations from P.L. 117-169, are from CRS com-

Continued

**Table 1. Appropriations for U.S. Park Police Operations, FY2018-FY2024**  
(\$ millions)

| Year                                 | Appropriation        |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| FY2018                               | \$110.4              |
| FY2019                               | \$106.5              |
| FY2020                               | \$109.2              |
| FY2021                               | \$114.8 <sup>a</sup> |
| FY2022                               | \$118.5              |
| FY2023                               | \$123.4              |
| FY2024                               | \$123.4              |
| Multiple (P.L. 117-169) <sup>b</sup> | \$29.0               |
| <b>Total, FY2018-FY2024</b>          | <b>\$835.3</b>       |

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Although all Americans have the right to engage in peaceful protests, violent demonstrations such as the one on July 24, 2024, have no place in our nation and must be condemned by action. ANSWER and other Shut it Down for Palestine-affiliated groups that participated in the antisemitic July 24, 2024, riots continue to wreak havoc across the United States through so-called protests. For example, on September 26, 2024, organizations including Code Pink and the People's Forum gathered to demand Prime Minister Netanyahu's arrest near the United Nations Headquarters in New York.<sup>62</sup> This event—according to its organizers—served to build upon the July 24 riots.<sup>63</sup> Worse yet, to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the October 7, 2023, massacre carried out by Palestinian terrorists in Israel, ANSWER, the People's Forum, Palestinian Youth Movement, Code Pink and other Shut it Down-linked groups organized international and nationwide days of action.<sup>64</sup> Many of these same groups, including ANSWER, have announced plans to protest President Donald J. Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2025.<sup>65</sup> These upcoming protests, like the one on July 24, 2024, are likely to take place on federal lands in Washington, D.C.

Propelled by the July 2024 antisemitic riots that desecrated National Park lands, the Committee continues to investigate ANSWER and other groups that prop up the Shut it Down for Palestine movement.<sup>66</sup> Ongoing Congressional oversight is required to ensure that the groups are held accountable for the permit provisions and laws they violate under the guise of protesting, and also that the public gathering permitting processes is adapted to prevent repeat offenders from continuing to damage federal property and incite violence.

munication with the NPS budget office on September 18, 2024. The FY 2021 appropriation includes non-recurring funding of \$2.4 million for law enforcement, visitor and employee safety, resource protection, and other activities conducted by the U.S. Park Police during the Presidential Inauguration. Sections 50221–50224 of P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, appropriated funding to NPS and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), including \$250 million collectively for both agencies for land conservation and resiliency projects (Sec. 50221), \$250 million collectively for both agencies for ecosystem and habitat restoration (Sec. 50222), \$500 million for NPS to hire employees (Sec. 50233), and \$200 million for NPS deferred maintenance (Sec. 50224). In communication with CRS, the NPS budget office reported that \$29 million has been programmed from the IRA for the U.S. Park Police.

<sup>62</sup> See *Fueled by Outrage, People Demand Action Against Netanyahu in NYC*, CODEPINK (Sept. 23, 2024), <https://www.codepink.org/nycnetanyahuaddress>.

<sup>63</sup> See *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., *Oct. 5 Day of Action: One Year of Genocide, One Year of Resistance*, ANSWER COALITION (Sept. 20, 2024), [https://www.answercoalition.org/oct\\_5\\_day\\_of\\_action\\_one\\_year\\_of\\_genocide\\_one\\_year\\_of\\_resistance](https://www.answercoalition.org/oct_5_day_of_action_one_year_of_genocide_one_year_of_resistance); *One Year of Genocide, One Year of Resistance NYC*, CODEPINK, <https://www.codepink.org/1yearnyc>; *Nationwide Days of Action Planned For One Year Anniversary of Genocide in Gaza*, CODEPINK (Oct. 1, 2024), <https://www.codepink.org/oneyeargeneralrelease>.

<sup>65</sup> See *National day of action Jan. 20: PROTEST on Inauguration Day—We Fight Back!*, ANSWER COALITION (Nov. 18, 2024), <https://www.answercoalition.org/we-fight-back>; *We Fight Back—Jan 20, 2025*, THE PEOPLE'S FORUM, <https://peoplesforum.org/events/we-fight-back-jan-20-2025/>.

<sup>66</sup> See Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, et al. to Brian Becker, National Director, ANSWER Coalition (Oct. 31, 2024), [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.10.31\\_hnr\\_letter\\_to\\_answer\\_coalition.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2024.10.31_hnr_letter_to_answer_coalition.pdf).

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON DESECRATING OLD  
GLORY: INVESTIGATING HOW THE PRO-  
HAMAS PROTESTS TURNED NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE LAND INTO A VIOLENT DISGRACE**

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**Tuesday, December 10, 2024  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, DC**

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The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:19 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Paul Gosar [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gosar, Rosendale, Collins, Westerman; and Stansbury.

Also present: Representatives Carl, D'Esposito, Miller-Meeks, Stauber, Steil, Van Orden, Williams, and Yakym.

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on "Desecrating Old Glory: Investigating How the Pro-Hamas Protests Turned National Park Service Land Into a Violent Disgrace."

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Member. I, therefore, ask unanimous consent that all other Members' statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to sit and participate in today's hearing: the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber; the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Carl; the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Steil; the gentlewoman from Iowa, Dr. Miller-Meeks; the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Yakym; the gentleman from New York, Mr. D'Esposito; the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Van Orden; and the gentleman from New York, Mr. Williams.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize the Full Committee Chairman, Mr. Westerman, for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS**

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

When Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu gave a joint address to Congress in July, violent protesters clashed with law enforcement less than a mile away at Union Station. The rioters chanted terrorist slogans and hurled what appeared to be human feces at U.S. Park Police officers, destroyed government property, burned American flags and an effigy of Prime Minister Netanyahu, and raised a Palestinian flag in place of Old Glory on Federal property. That night, I joined my fellow Republican members to return Old Glory to its rightful place.

While we observed the vandalized property just a few hours after the riots finally cleared, the questions on all of our minds was, how did this happen? After all, DC is no stranger to protest and free speech demonstrations. But in this case something went horribly wrong. That is why we are here today to investigate how pro-Hamas protests turned National Park Service land into a violent national disgrace.

On July 23, the National Park Service issued a permit for the ANSWER Coalition to hold a public gathering. ANSWER's own language on the permit made it very clear that they support anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli rhetoric. The permit authorized organizers to gather at locations around the capital, including Columbus Plaza at Union Station. Protest organizers intentionally selected this date to coincide with Prime Minister Netanyahu's joint address to Congress.

Long before the permit was approved, the ANSWER Coalition advertised their event on social media as an opportunity to "arrest Netanyahu." ANSWER Coalition is not unfamiliar with public gathering permits and has had a long history with the National Park Service. These permits list numerous provisions with clear penalties, including fines and potential jail time for breaking the rules. Climbing a statue, for example, violates the permit. However, anyone who watched the news will see that the organizers of this event violated nearly every one of the permit's terms and conditions right off the bat.

The Department of the Interior and the National Park Service also failed to provide critical support for the Park Police for this event, despite knowing well in advance that protests were expected.

This was not a one-off event. Shortly after the tragic events on October 7, 2023, the ANSWER Coalition was one of the major organizations involved with launching the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, which has disrupted life on college campuses and targeted infrastructure in major cities across the United States over the last year. The group is expected back in DC on January 20, 2025 to protest the presidential inauguration in an attempt to disrupt the events of the day.

As our witnesses will testify, many of these organizations advocate for hateful and radical ideologies throughout America, and have strong ties to terrorist organizations across the Middle East,

including Hamas. They also have associations with the Chinese Communist Party.

To be clear, I support every American's right to peacefully protest and express their beliefs, even when we disagree. But there are rules that must be followed, and you can't get a permit that says what the rules are and then blatantly disobey those rules and expect for there not to be consequences.

It is no secret that our foreign adversaries seek to divide and disrupt our country, and they are doing so right now through a vast network of radical advocacy groups that target and radicalize our youth right here in the United States. Our Federal lands should never be used as pawns for such an insidious purpose.

I yield back, Mr. Gosar.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. I will now turn to my opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. PAUL GOSAR, A REPRESENTATIVE  
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Dr. GOSAR. Good morning everyone. I would like to thank our witnesses for coming before the Committee today to examine the pro-Hamas protests at Union Station, turning National Park Service land into a violent disgrace.

On July 24, Prime Minister Netanyahu came before this Congress to share with us a message of hope for Israel and for the remaining hostages held by Hamas. He called for solidarity with Israel in the face of evil, a call heard by every member of that chamber. However, just down the street at Union Station, violent pro-Hamas protesters sought to disrupt Netanyahu's address through violence and destruction.

The National Park Service had authorized the ANSWER Coalition to hold their anti-Israel protests that day, which, to no one's surprise, turned violent and led the National Park Service to revoke the permit for the event. The ANSWER Coalition operates under the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, which is responsible for major pro-Hamas protests following the tragic events on October 7. This movement is part of a larger foreign effort to sow discord and distrust in our nation, spur anti-American sentiment, influence our politics, and to radicalize our youth.

I want to take a second to emphasize the severity of this problem. This sustained effort, backed by some of our most dangerous adversaries and a steady stream of dark foreign money, is gaining serious traction with youth on college campuses across the nation, and particularly on social media. The Chinese Communist Party has assembled a sophisticated and powerful network of influence with ties to radical advocacy organizations in the United States who attempt to influence our public discourse, disrupt major infrastructure, and espouse hateful ideologies that divide our nation.

Meanwhile, Hamas and other dangerous terrorist groups benefit from their close relationships with these organizations and their ability to spread Hamas' message across the United States uninhibited. We must put an end to the foreign powers and terrorist organizations exploiting our First Amendment for their own gain.

Now, going back to the events of July 24, the question remains: Why did the National Park Service issue the permit to the

ANSWER Coalition in the first place? This could have been prevented. The ANSWER Coalition has a known history with the National Park Service. They have repeatedly demonstrated that they cannot be trusted to maintain their order and peace on National Park Service lands in other events.

In November 2023, the ANSWER Coalition held an event at the Freedom Plaza, where D.C. Metropolitan Police reported property damage and vandalism at the site. Two weeks after, they participated in a demonstration outside Union Station, which disrupted Metro services and led to three arrests for defacing public property.

On June 8, 2024, the ANSWER Coalition protested outside the White House, where rioters vandalized Lafayette Square and assaulted a National Park ranger.

It baffles me that, with the troubling history of disorder and violence, the National Park Service will still grant the ANSWER Coalition a public gathering permit for July 24, while even so much is being asked to pay for these fines from the previous damages in the first place.

I strongly believe in our right to engage in peaceful demonstrations. It is a bedrock of our democracy. However, the events that took place on July 24 were anything but peaceful. Our flag was torn down and burned, rioters assaulted Federal officers, and Columbus Plaza was vandalized with anti-American and pro-Hamas graffiti with phrases such as, "I commend Hamas," and "Your community is next." The hateful rhetoric and violence displayed that day have no place in America. None.

Today, I hope to hear from the National Park Service on how they are working to prevent violence on Federal lands, how the ANSWER Coalition will be held responsible for the destruction of that day, and their plans to support the Park Police to prevent further violation and destruction on Federal properties. Enough is enough.

I now recognize the Ranking Member, Ms. Stansbury, for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MELANIE A. STANSBURY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO**

Ms. STANSBURY. Good morning, everyone, and thank you to the Ranking Member and the Ranking Member for your statements this morning.

I too share in the concern of defacing of public spaces. Oh, Chairman. I am sorry.

Dr. GOSAR. That is all right.

[Laughter.]

Ms. STANSBURY. I am so sorry. The Chairman's, the Chairman's. Pardon me, I am sorry.

I too share in the concern of defacing of our public property and violence in public spaces, and I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

The U.S. Park Police support the Department of the Interior and National Park Service in maintaining our cherished parks and ensuring people can enjoy them safely, in part because of the geographic area they cover. For example, in Washington, DC they



have a unique charge. This is from their vision statement: “We are guided by the principle of the Constitution, working to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to safely exercise their First Amendment rights.”

To carry out this work, the Park Police must balance public safety on one hand, and protecting Federal property with safeguarding First Amendment rights. This, of course, can be challenging at times here in our nation’s capital.

The Park Police’s preparation for demonstrations involves planning for crowd control, assessing risks, and coordinating responses to de-escalate potential violence. When situations intensify, the Park Police must rely on their training, clear protocols, and sufficient resources to address dangerous conditions without infringing on constitutional rights.

I want to take a moment to emphasize that sufficient resources is key, and I believe in this particular situation.

I am hopeful that today we can have a constructive conversation about how we can improve these processes, that we can increase resources for our National Parks and our Park Police.

But I do worry that there is a bit of performative politics coming from my colleagues across the aisle. This is a rescheduled hearing that had been scheduled before the election and, as was just stated, there is concern that there may be protests upcoming in the inauguration. This is, of course, very much a real concern, and we should be performing oversight and preparing for that, much as we are preparing for both January 6 and January 20 as both an institution and our Federal agencies.

But these concerns should be applied consistently. As we all know, our national Capitol was attacked on January 6 when our last presidential transition occurred. And similar to what we are talking about here today, there was the defacing of property and violence on the Capitol grounds. I don’t think that I need to remind my colleagues about what went down on January 6, but I would hope that we would apply a consistent metric to our concern for Federal property and the safety of our national law enforcement.

Many of these issues with respect to national parks come down to resources. I will also note that in many cases the issues that we are discussing here really come down to whether or not our Federal agencies have sufficient staffing and sufficient resources to address the concerns that we are discussing. This is a budgetary matter. As we have seen time and time again, there have been proposals to implement severe funding cuts to the Park Police and Park Service, depriving officers of training, equipment, and personnel, and a consistent budget.

I will be interested to see if our new administration, which plans to create a new government efficiency agency which is led by outside billionaires and interests, will cut the Park Police funding even more, leaving our public with even less protection.

If we truly value public safety, respect for our law enforcement, and constitutional freedoms, we cannot cherry pick when and where these principles apply, and I hope that we can work on a bipartisan basis to come up with real solutions and reject cynical hearings and commit to giving the Park Police the tools that they need to protect our Federal property, to facilitate peaceful protests,

and to respond appropriately to escalating situations while also ensuring that those individuals who have committed these acts are held accountable for the exercise of their authority.

And with that I say thank you, and I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. Maybe accountability would be a great way to start, that you have to pay for your problems before you can actually have a say.

I first now would like to introduce the witnesses for the first panel: the Honorable Mark Greenblatt, Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC; and Mr. Charles Cuvelier, Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC.

Let me remind you that you have 5 minutes to speak. You will have a green light during that time. At the 1-minute point, it will turn yellow, and then you will see the red light, that should kind of wrap it up.

To begin your testimony, make sure you push the "on" button so everybody can hear you.

And with that, I recognize Mr. Greenblatt for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MARK GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. GREENBLATT. Chairman Westerman, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Yesterday, our office published an inspection report exploring two critical areas facing this hearing: (1) the National Park Service's First Amendment permitting process; and (2) how NPS manages the events once the permits are approved.

The report we issued yesterday is one in a series of reports that shed light on the challenges confronting both the Park Service and the Park Police related to First Amendment demonstrations in Washington. Today, I will present three case studies from our oversight which cover three relevant topics to our discussion: (1) public safety; (2) damages; and (3) law enforcement communication and coordination.

First, we have identified important public safety issues related to prohibited items brought to demonstrations. Specifically in one permitted rally on the Ellipse, hundreds of people began arriving hours early before the event, with prohibited items including backpacks and bags. Once the attendees realized that bags could not be brought into the Ellipse area, they began abandoning them in various locations around the National Mall, lying on the ground and hanging in trees. Secret Service officers and demonstration volunteers collected many of the bags and placed them in piles on Constitution Avenue. Park Police canine officers then swept some of the bags for explosives.

But here's the problem: The officers said they were unable to sweep all of the bags because there were so many, and some of the bags were buried underneath other piles of other bags. These bags could easily have contained explosives or other dangerous items, posing a risk to the health and safety of members of the public, law

enforcement personnel, and even the President of the United States who was in attendance.

We found that the NPS and Park Service police did not have a process in place to handle the eventuality of abandoned bags. I am concerned that malicious actors could take advantage of a situation like that, should it happen again. Therefore, we identified this issue in our prior report and encourage the Department to assess and mitigate these safety risks.

Our second case study concerns damages. The issue of damages poses a real challenge to the National Park Service. On the one hand, Federal law provides that NPS may seek to recover damages from event organizers, including First Amendment demonstrations. In fact, NPS's First Amendment permits themselves include clear language informing the permit holder that they may be liable for costs and damages during their events. Applicable NPS policy even provides that NPS should inspect the sites both before and after an event to document any damages to NPS property.

That said, we believe there are gaps related to the Department's handling of damages during those First Amendment events. Indeed, we found no evidence that the Park Service has ever pursued damages from permit holders. We understand that the Park Service has not established a process for recovering damages, and does not have a system for tracking damages that have occurred on those First Amendment events.

To evaluate the scope of the damages from those events, we had to rely on the recollection of one NPS official. Based on this one official's recollection and our discussions with another park superintendent, we identified seven First Amendment events that resulted in damages to NPS property. NPS then provided documentation showing that the estimated damages for those seven events totaled approximately \$317,000.

After one of those events the Park Service documented approximately \$213,000 in damages to the Ellipse turf. Our review found, however, that NPS had not retained the pre-event photos that documented the condition of the site prior to the event, and the Park Service did not attempt to recover damages from the permit holder.

Now, when discussing this issue, I recognize that the recovery of damages poses a real challenge to NPS, and I acknowledge the complicated legal and policy implications that surround this issue. Therefore, while we think NPS can take steps to improve its handling of damages, I want to emphasize that we appreciate that there are no easy answers here.

The third case study concerns law enforcement coordination and communication. This is again by Park Police during First Amendment events. Coordination and communication among law enforcement entities are crucial for two reasons: (1) because they are frequently noisy and chaotic environments; and (2) because these events involve other law enforcement entities.

In a prior review, we found that poor communication and coordination among the numerous law enforcement agencies in a First Amendment event may have contributed to confusion and the use of tactics that appeared inconsistent with Park Police's operational plan. For example, we found that the Park Police and the Secret Service did not share a radio channel to communicate, that the

Park Service Police primarily conveyed information to assisting law enforcement entities orally, and that several law enforcement officers could not hear the incident commander's announcements.

We recommended that Park Police improve its communication procedures to better manage multi-agency operations and to promote operational consistency among various law enforcement organizations, and the Park Police agreed with our recommendations.

This concludes my testimony, and I hope these case studies add value to this discussion, and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Greenblatt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MARK LEE GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR  
GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the Office of Inspector General's work relating to the role of the National Park Service (NPS) and the United States Park Police (USPP) in permitting, planning for, and responding to First Amendment activities on Federal land. As you know, inspectors general have a direct reporting relationship to Congress. My office and I take this obligation seriously, and we appreciate your continued support for our fair, objective, and independent oversight.

### **Background**

#### *DOI OIG's Mission and Operations*

The Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of Inspector General's (OIG) mission is to provide independent oversight to promote accountability, integrity, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the DOI. The OIG's less than 300 employees oversee the programs and operations of the DOI, which has more than 70,000 employees, 11 Bureaus, Offices, and a range of diverse programs, including roughly \$10 billion in grants and contracts, \$20 billion in natural resource revenues, Federal trust responsibilities to 574 Federally recognized Indian Tribes and Alaska Native villages, stewardship of 20 percent of the Nation's land, and management of lands, subsurface rights, and offshore areas that produce approximately 17 percent of the Nation's energy.

Our work can be grouped into two general categories: (1) investigations on the one hand, and (2) audits, inspections, and evaluations on the other. Our Office of Investigations investigates allegations of criminal, civil, and administrative misconduct involving DOI employees, contractors, grantees, and programs. These investigations can result in criminal prosecutions, fines, civil monetary penalties, administrative sanctions, and personnel actions. Our Office of Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations (AIE) conducts independent reviews that measure DOI programs and operations against best practices and objective criteria to determine efficiency and effectiveness. They also audit contracts, examine financial statements, and conduct cyber security audits, to name a few examples. AIE's work results in actionable recommendations to the Department that promote positive change in the DOI.

#### **National Park Service's First Amendment Permit Process**

The mission of the NPS is to "preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." NPS manages 429 individual units—commonly referred to as "parks"—covering more than 85 million acres in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. These units include the National Mall and Memorial Parks, national historic sites, and national monuments.

We recently completed an inspection of the NPS' First Amendment permit process, attached as Appendix A to today's testimony. Our objective was to explore both the permitting process and how NPS manages the events once permits are approved.

#### *The NPS Permitting Process for Demonstrations*

Demonstrations of more than 25 people on NPS park areas in Washington, DC, require a permit issued by the NPS. Pursuant to NPS regulations, the National

Capital Region's Regional Director (Regional Director) is authorized to issue permits for demonstrations in NPS park areas in and around Washington, DC. According to NPS policy, the permit process is intended to ensure public safety and resource protection and to avoid conflicts with other permitted activities.

NPS regulations define the term "demonstration" to include "demonstrations, picketing, speechmaking, marching, holding vigils or religious services and all other like forms of conduct that involve the communication or expression of views or grievances, engaged in by one or more persons, the conduct of which is reasonably likely to draw a crowd or onlookers."<sup>1</sup> As NPS policy explains, these activities constitute public expressions of views protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.<sup>2</sup> According to NPS' *Management Policies 2006 and Reference Manual Special Park Uses*, when permits are issued for First Amendment activities, there are no fees or costs, and no insurance is required for the activities.

The NPS' First Amendment permit process begins when an organization or individual submits an application to conduct a First Amendment event. According to the NPS National Mall and Memorial Parks *Event Planning Guide*,<sup>3</sup> the application provides NPS with the preliminary information necessary to begin an assessment of the appropriateness and feasibility of the activities, design, and timeframe for the proposed event. Federal regulations<sup>4</sup> state that applications must be received by the Division of Permits Management at least 48 hours in advance and all demonstration applications are deemed granted, subject to all limitations and restrictions applicable to said park area, unless denied within 24 hours of receipt.<sup>5</sup>

According to the NPS, once the permit application is received, a permit specialist is assigned and will oversee the application throughout the permitting process. Per the *Event Planning Guide*, depending on the size, scope, and nature of the proposed event, the permit specialist will schedule a consultation planning meeting with the applicant regarding requirements and logistics to ensure proper use and resource protection. The *Event Planning Guide* states that the meeting will generally include a discussion of space availability, event operation, and remediation of any potential damages to the park. Depending on the event, the permit specialist can request and require the applicant to provide documentation to ensure public safety and the protection of resources, such as:

- A **Site Plan** that is drawn to scale and clearly displays all structures the applicant wishes to set up during the event, such as stages, video screens, food and beverage tents, first aid tents, security or crowd-control fencing, and portable toilets.
- An **Operations Inventory** that ensures the site will be set up, used, and broken down appropriately; if applicable, it will include requirements related to structures such as video production and displays, audio and lighting, and trash and recycling receptacles.
- A detailed chronological **Event Schedule** that contains information about installation, event operations, and removal procedures.
- A **Crowd Management Plan** that covers necessary arrangements for safe and efficient crowd management. This includes appropriate plans for queuing lines, safety personnel to manage safe access, safety staff inside the event, and staff to manage safe egress.
- A **Security, Communication, Sustainability, and First Aid Plan** must be submitted and coordinated with USPP and District of Columbia Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

<sup>1</sup> 36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(1)(i).

<sup>2</sup> Nat'l Park Serv., *Management Policies 2006*, § 8.6.3 "First Amendment Activities" (Mgmt. Policies 2006); Nat'l Park Serv., *Reference Manual 53: Special Park Uses*, Release Number 1, App. 3—First Amendment Activities, p. A3-1. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." U.S. Const. amend. I.

<sup>3</sup> NPS, National Mall and Memorial Parks, *Event Planning Guide*, "Section 2: "Permitting Process."

<sup>4</sup> 36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(3).

<sup>5</sup> According to the Chief Division of Permits Management, although applications may be granted within 24 hours, a permit is not issued until the applicant provides all necessary documents to NPS.

- A **Fire and Life Safety Plan**<sup>6</sup> that provides documentation showing how the permittee plans to comply with fire and life safety codes and standards, including fire codes, commercial cooking controls, and standards for portable fire extinguishers. It must also include an emergency plan with evacuation procedures.

Per Federal regulation,<sup>7</sup> NPS can deny a permit in writing on specified, narrow grounds if:

1. It conflicts with a “fully executed prior application for the same time and place” that “has been or will be granted” and “authoriz[es] activities which do not reasonably permit multiple occupancy of the particular area”;
2. “It reasonably appears that the proposed demonstration or special event will present a clear and present danger to the public safety, good order, or health”;
3. The proposed demonstration “is of such a nature or duration that it cannot reasonably be accommodated in the particular area applied for,” reasonably considering “possible damage to the park”; or
4. “The application proposes activities contrary to any of the provisions of this section or other applicable law or regulation.”

Depending on the size and scope of an event, an NPS event compliance monitor may be assigned to the event. Per the *Event Planning Guide*, the assigned compliance monitor physically attends the event to ensure the permittee follows the conditions NPS set forth in the permit. The Chief of the Division of Permits Management told us that the compliance monitor may document, through photographs, the before and after conditions of an area by conducting “pre-event” and “post-event” walkthroughs to identify any damages to property resulting from the event. According to the *Event Planning Guide*, if damages occur during the event, the permittee is responsible for those damages.

The regulations also state that “where a permit has been granted, or is deemed to have been granted,” the NPS “may revoke that permit” under certain circumstances set forth in the regulation, which largely mirror the bases for denial of a permit in the first instance.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, the USPP may revoke a permit during the conduct of a demonstration if continuation of the event presents a clear and present danger to the public safety, good order or health or for any violation of applicable law or regulation.

#### *First Amendment Jurisprudence Related to Public Demonstrations*

NPS policy regarding demonstrations is informed by the unique protections afforded to speech under the First Amendment and related jurisprudence. More specifically, Federal courts have consistently held that, under the First Amendment, the NPS is required to<sup>9</sup> Related jurisprudence has likewise consistently held that public areas in the seat of the Federal Government in Washington, DC, such as the National Mall and the Ellipse, possess “unmistakable symbolic significance” for the exercise of First Amendment rights.<sup>10</sup> Activities in these public spaces receive the

<sup>6</sup>National Park Service, Interior I—National Capital Region, NCR Fire and Life Safety Temporary Events Policy.

<sup>7</sup>36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(4)(viii).

<sup>8</sup>36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(3). The regulation states that “the Regional Director may revoke” a permit that has been granted or deemed granted “pursuant to paragraph (g)(6)” of the regulation. Paragraph (g)(6) states in pertinent part “[a] permit issued for a demonstration is revocable only upon a ground for which an application therefor would be subject to denial under paragraphs (g) (4) or (5).”

<sup>9</sup>*See, e.g., A.N.S.W.E.R. Coal. v. Kempthorne*, 537 F. Supp. 2d 183, 194 (D.D.C. 2008) (“In public forums such as the areas within the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Park at issue in this case, the government’s ability to permissibly restrict expressive conduct is very limited: the government may enforce reasonable time, place and manner restrictions as long as the restrictions are content-neutral, are narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest, and leave open ample alternative channels of communication.”) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>10</sup>*Id.* at 194; *see also A.N.S.W.E.R. Coal. v. Basham*, 845 F.3d 1199, 1215 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (stating that Freedom Plaza, the White House sidewalk, and Lafayette Park are “areas [that] have historic and symbolic importance” and quoting *Quaker Action IV*, in which the Supreme Court stated, “[T]he White House sidewalk, Lafayette Park, and the Ellipse constitute a unique situs for the exercise of First Amendment rights”); *ISKCON of Potomac, Inc. v. Kennedy*, 61 F.3d 949, 951–52 (D.C. Cir. 1995) (describing the Mall as “an area of particular significance in the life of the Capital and the Nation” that, among other uses, “is the place where men and women from across the country will gather in the tens of thousands to voice their protests or support causes of every kind. It is here that the constitutional rights of speech and peaceful assembly find their fullest expression.”).

strongest First Amendment protections, and “the government’s ability to permissibly restrict expressive conduct [in these areas] is very limited.”<sup>11</sup>

In keeping with these strong First Amendment protections, it is under only rare circumstances that a permit can be denied or revoked. This is because the Supreme Court has held that “‘public places’ historically associated with the free exercise of expressive activities, such as streets, sidewalks, and parks,” are “public forums” where the government’s ability “to limit expressive activity [is] sharply circumscribed.”<sup>12</sup> In these public forums, the Government’s regulation of political speech “must be subjected to the most exacting scrutiny,” whereby the Government must “show that ‘the regulation is necessary to serve a compelling state interest and that it is narrowly drawn to achieve that end.’”<sup>13</sup>

The NPS’ regulations reflect these principles, providing that the NPS can deny a permit application if “[i]t reasonably appears that the proposed demonstration or special event will present a clear and present danger to the public safety, good order, or health.”<sup>14</sup> The regulations do not define or provide guidance on what constitutes “clear and present danger” sufficient to deny a permit. Federal case law articulating the “clear and present danger” standard, however, states that there must be clear evidence that a “substantive evil[]” will follow the speech and that the threat of such evil occurring is real and imminent.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, as explained in NPS policy, “the NPS may reasonably regulate” First Amendment speech “to protect park resources and values, and to protect visitor safety.”<sup>16</sup> The policy allows “certain aspects” of demonstrations to be regulated, “such as the time when, the place where, and the manner in which the activity is conducted.”<sup>17</sup> The policy also provides, however, “that it is the conduct associated with the exercise of these rights that is regulated, and never the content of the message.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, when the NPS “allows one group to use an area or facility for expressing views, it must provide other groups with a similar opportunity, if requested . . . provided that all permit conditions are met.”<sup>19</sup>

#### *The NPS’ Law Enforcement Components and Their Responsibilities*

For public safety and to protect park resources, USPP will provide law enforcement services during NPS-permitted First Amendment events. USPP’s responsibilities include:

- Planning the security needs prior to the event.
- Maintaining a continual security presence during the event.
- Evaluating law enforcement activities after the event to document best practices and lessons learned, as well as reviewing live footage and other tools after the event to identify individuals who violated laws during the event.

According to USPP officials, to determine the security needs for NPS-permitted First Amendment events, officials from the Special Events Unit and the Intelligence and Counterterrorism Branch attend the consultation meetings the Division of Permits Management holds with the permit applicant. USPP officials told us that they fully participate in the meetings to obtain an understanding of the event, including the number of anticipated attendees; location; purpose of the event; planned activities occurring during the event; and information regarding any known potential threats specific to the event or counterdemonstrations. USPP also informed us that officials from DC Metropolitan Police Department, U.S. Secret Service, and

<sup>11</sup> See *Price v. Barr*, 514 F. Supp. 3d 171, 186 (D.D.C. 2021) (“In a traditional public forum—parks, streets, sidewalks, and the like—the government may impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on private speech, but restrictions based on content must satisfy strict scrutiny, and those based on viewpoint are prohibited. The same standards apply in designated public forums.”) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>12</sup> *U.S. v. Grace*, 461 U.S. 171, 177 (1983) (internal citations omitted); *Perry Educ. Ass’n v. Perry Loc. Educators’ Ass’n*, 460 U.S. 37, 45 (1983).

<sup>13</sup> *Boos v. Barry*, 485 U.S. 312, 321 (1988) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>14</sup> 36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(4)(vii)(B). Additional grounds for the NPS to deny a permit application, such as if a proposed event (1) conflicts with another event, (2) is of such a nature or duration that it cannot be reasonably accommodated in the area applied for, or (3) is contrary to other applicable laws or regulations. *Id.* § 7.96(g)(4)(vii)(A), (C), and (D), were not applicable here.

<sup>15</sup> *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47, 52 (1919); *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397, 419 (1989).

<sup>16</sup> Nat’l Park Serv., Director’s Order #53: *Special Park Uses*, § 9.1 “First Amendment Activities.”

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> Nat’l Park Serv., *Mgmt. Policies 2006*, at § 8.6.3 “First Amendment Activities.”

U.S. Capitol Police may also attend the meetings if the planned activities cross into their jurisdictions.

A Lieutenant of the Special Events Unit told us information is collected from permit meetings with the applicant, interagency coordination meetings, and USPP's Intelligence and Counterterrorism Branch. Using this information, officials from the Special Events Unit prepare either (1) an Incident Brief for smaller events that are less complex or where limited information is furnished by the applicant, or (2) an Incident Action Plan for planning more complex events or where more information is furnished by the applicant. According to the Lieutenant, both documents are used to brief assigned officers and provide guidance and information to commanders and officers in charge who are managing an event. USPP officials also told us that in preparing these documents, the Special Events Unit receives relevant intelligence information from USPP's Intelligence and Counterterrorism Branch to assist in making security and staffing decisions for an event.

Prior to the event, the Special Events Unit develops a staffing plan to provide officers with their specific duties for the event, including reporting time and location. The Lieutenant of the Special Events Unit told us that staffing is determined based on the circumstances of each event, such as the number of people expected to attend, the location, and the nature of the infrastructure involved.

USPP officials also informed us that depending on the event, USPP can have a full-force presence, meaning all available law enforcement personnel must report for duty. For the July 24, 2024 demonstration, an organization submitted a permit application to demonstrate on Pennsylvania Avenue between 3rd and 5th Streets, and then march to Columbus Circle, with expected attendance of 5,000 people. According to the Lieutenant of the Special Events Unit, USPP had a full-force presence of 174 officers for the demonstration. On the day of the demonstration, attendees began to conduct acts of vandalism at Columbus Circle, including defacing monuments with spray paint. Media reports incorrectly stated that only 29 officers were at Columbus Circle; USPP officials informed us that staffing assignments are fluid and that when the vandalism began, officers stationed at other locations moved to Columbus Circle. In addition, USPP officials informed us that other events were occurring on July 24, 2024 that required officers from USPP, including a funeral and an address to Congress—both of which were attended by the Prime Minister of Israel.

#### *Public Safety During the Event*

According to the *Event Planning Guide*,<sup>20</sup> during a First Amendment event, USPP is responsible for maintaining a continual security presence. USPP General Order 2301 states that during the event, USPP employs crowd management techniques, consisting of traffic posts, patrolling, security fencing plans, and screening for prohibited items. Also, when providing security for the event, in addition to USPP officer assignments, USPP can incorporate a number of specialized law enforcement units such as helicopter operations, horse-mounted patrol, canine detection, and criminal investigation. An attorney from the Office of the Solicitor, who has over 20 years' experience with NPS' First Amendment activities told us that most First Amendment events are peaceful, and participants are lawful. According to the Lieutenant of the Special Events Unit, in cases where a few individuals cause civil unrest during an event, removing those few individuals from the crowd can resolve the issue. However, the Lieutenant of the Intelligence and Counterterrorism Branch told us that, in some cases, the crowd may swarm the officers who are trying to remove these individuals.

Per General Order 2301, if basic crowd control techniques are insufficient to restore order or there is a risk of injury to officers and the public, USPP will deploy the Civil Disturbance Unit, which is a specialized unit consisting of highly trained and equipped personnel whose mission is to bring a situation under control during violent and unlawful civil disturbances. According to the *Event Planning Guide*,<sup>21</sup> the permittee must follow all USPP instructions, and failure to comply with USPP guidance and all established permit requirements may result in the revocation of the permit.<sup>22</sup> Once a permit is revoked, USPP will close the park and clear everyone from the area. General Order 2301 states that absent urgent circumstances, the crowd shall be given warnings and the opportunity to withdraw peacefully and disperse.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Section 1.4.4, "United States Park Police/Security."

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> 36 C.F.R. § 7.96(g)(6) authorizes the revocation of a permit if continuation of the event presents a clear and present danger to public safety.

<sup>23</sup> These warnings were not always effective. For example, in our review of USPP actions at Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020, we found that although the USPP issued three dispersal warn-



### *After the Event*

Per Special Events Unit officials, after an event, USPP officers can provide the Special Events Unit feedback and identify best practices and lessons learned to improve future events. Special Event Unit Officials told us that after each event, employees and supervisors may voluntarily fill out an after-action review form or provide event feedback via email. Any feedback and potential changes are discussed during weekly USPP meetings and, if appropriate, the suggested changes identified are implemented. These officials told us that, depending on the event or upon request, the Special Events Unit can also solicit feedback by (1) sending standard or tailored questions to all USPP officers who participated in the event; (2) consolidating responses; (3) holding one-on-one meetings with USPP officials to clarify responses and get their feedback and ideas; and (4) evaluating potential changes based on the responses and one-on-one meetings. For example, the Special Events Unit officials told us that the Major Branch Commander for the Icon Protection Branch requested that this process be used after the July 24, 2024 permitted event that resulted in vandalism near Columbus Circle.

### *Challenges Policing First Amendment Events*

OIG's work illustrates other challenges that the NPS and USPP often face when policing First Amendment demonstrations in Washington, DC.

According to the Lieutenant of the Intelligence and Counterterrorism Branch, after an event that results in civil unrest, USPP will review live footage, body cameras, U.S. Department of Transportation cameras, and USPP's own surveillance cameras to identify individuals who may have engaged in criminal activity.

For example, this official told us that USPP made 10 arrests during the July 24, 2024 event and later identified another individual through surveillance footage. Based on a press release<sup>24</sup> from the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, this individual was arrested on October 4, 2024, for allegedly spray-painting the monument near Columbus Circle on July 24, 2024, during an NPS-permitted First Amendment event. The press release reported that the alleged criminal activity was captured on video USPP filmed from an observation post looking down at Columbus Circle, and the same event was captured on open-source video and photos that were later posted to various internet platforms.

In 2023, the OIG published the results of our review of the actions of the NPS and USPP in preparing for a demonstration at the Ellipse on January 6, 2021. Our review focused primarily on the NPS' permitting process and related activities. We found that the NPS complied with legal requirements in issuing the permit for the demonstration and managed the permitting process in accordance with guidance pertaining to the First Amendment. We also found, however, that the NPS did not comply with notice requirements regarding prohibited items at the Ellipse.

Specifically, USPP officers reported that hundreds of people began arriving hours before the event with bags, backpacks, and other prohibited items. Once attendees realized that bags could not be brought into the Ellipse area, they began abandoning them in various locations on the ground and in trees on the National Mall. U.S. Secret Service officers and demonstration volunteers collected many of the bags and placed them into piles on Constitution Avenue, and USPP K-9 officers then swept the bags for explosives. The officers said that they were unable to sweep all the bags because there were so many, and some of them were buried under piles of other bags.

The NPS issued its "public use limitation" prohibiting the public from bringing certain items to the demonstration at 10:46 a.m., several hours after demonstrators had already begun arriving at the Ellipse. This limitation was issued at the request of the Secret Service in consultation with the USPP to help ensure public safety during the demonstration. The NPS, however, did not make its record of determination or list of prohibited items available to the public prior to the demonstration, as regulations require. The information did not appear on entrance way signage, nor did the NPS provide the information through electronic notification, press releases, social media radio announcements, or other available means.

ings to the crowd using a long-range acoustic device, evidence suggested that not all the protestors could hear and understand the warnings, and the USPP warnings also did not inform protestors where to exit or provide a safe escape route.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia, Press Release, *Protester Federally Charged with Damaging U.S. Government Property at Union Station* (Oct. 4, 2024).

In our review of U.S. Park Police actions at Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020,<sup>25</sup> we found that poor communication and coordination among the numerous law enforcement agencies involved—including USPP, U.S. Secret Service, Arlington County Police Department, the MPD, and the Bureau of Prisons—may have contributed to confusion and use of tactics that appeared inconsistent with the USPP’s operational plan. For example, we found that the Park Police and the Secret Service did not use a shared radio channel to communicate, that the USPP primarily conveyed information orally to assisting law enforcement entities, and that several law enforcement officers could not clearly hear the incident commander’s dispersal warnings. We recommended that the USPP improve its field communication procedures to better manage multiagency operations and to promote operational consistency among law enforcement organizations working jointly with the USPP. The USPP agreed with our recommendation and stated that it had adjusted its operational planning efforts and implemented procedures that ensure the full accountability of all law enforcement personnel. We consider this recommendation closed and implemented.

Park Police policy provides that, before the USPP acts against protestors, officers should generally provide people the opportunity to withdraw and disperse peacefully as well as provide a safe escape route. In the same review, we found that although the USPP issued three dispersal warnings to the crowd using a long-range acoustic device (LRAD) at Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020, evidence suggested that not all of the protestors could hear and understand the warnings. Other than using the LRAD, we did not identify any other steps that the USPP took to ensure that protestors could hear the warnings. The Park Police warnings also did not inform protestors where to exit or provide a safe escape route. As a result, we recommended that the USPP develop a more detailed warning policy defining procedures for operations involving protests that may require use of force but do not involve high-volume arrests. Among other considerations, we recommended that the policy include detailed dispersal warning procedures and how the USPP will ensure that everyone, including all law enforcement officials and the individuals they are trying to disperse, can hear dispersal warnings. The USPP agreed to implement our recommendation, and issued an updated version of General Order 2301, “Demonstrations and Special Events,” in response. We also consider this recommendation closed and implemented.

In addition to these challenges, we have also identified issues related to the USPP’s radio system and dispatch center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (WMA). The USPP’s radio system and its dispatch center personnel provide the backbone for the support infrastructure required to facilitate accurate, real-time communication and decision making for USPP officers and ensure officer and public safety. Dispatchers’ responsibilities include managing the USPP’s radio communications between USPP law enforcement personnel and with other Federal, State, and local agencies; deploying and tracking personnel and equipment; monitoring hundreds of emergency alarms located across NPS properties in the WMA; and coordinating emergency law enforcement, medical, and fire assistance for incidents reported by officers and the public.

In a Management Advisory published in February 2022, we reported that the condition of the dispatch center’s workspace and equipment undermined its ability to achieve its core public safety mission.<sup>26</sup> We found holes in the roof that allowed birds to enter and leave droppings on furniture and equipment, suspected black mold throughout the workspace, outdated and deficient equipment, longstanding staffing and training deficiencies, and failure to establish minimum standards and critical guidance. We made four recommendations to the USPP that we consider closed and implemented.

With respect to the USPP’s radio system in the WMA, Department of the Interior (DOI) policy requires the USPP to record all radio and phone communications to help support public safety and law enforcement needs. These recordings allow dispatchers to instantly play back radio communications or phone calls in emergency situations, and prosecutors frequently use the recordings as evidence. In July 2022, we reported on our review examining whether the USPP has had problems capturing recordings for its primary dispatch radio channel and its two secondary radio

<sup>25</sup> Review of U.S. Park Police Actions at Lafayette Park, available at <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/oig-reports/DOI/SpecialReviewUSPPActionsAtLafayetteParkPublic.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> *Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police’s Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*, available at *Safety Concerns and Other Deficiencies at the U.S. Park Police’s Dispatch Operations Center in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area* (oversight.gov).

channels: the “admin” channel and the special events channel. Because the phone lines for the USPP dispatch operations center, like the USPP’s radio communications, are required to be recorded, we also examined any problems the USPP has had recording its phone lines.<sup>27</sup>

We found that, notwithstanding DOI requirements, the USPP failed to record radio communications from its admin channel from October 2018 through June 2020 and from its special event channel from at least March 2018 through August 2020. In contrast, we found that the USPP continuously recorded radio communications from its primary dispatch channel and dispatch center phone lines from 2018 through August 2020, when the analog recorder was replaced. We did not find evidence suggesting that the USPP intentionally failed to record its radio communications.

At the time of our review, we found that technical problems prevented the USPP from accessing recordings stored on the USPP’s analog recorder, so the USPP could not meet its records retention obligations for recordings on that device. USPP installed its digital recorder in October 2020, and our review found that the digital recorder regularly recorded all radio and phone communications in the dispatch center. Still, we found the USPP’s digital recorder does not fully comply with DOI policy because the USPP has not set up the recorder to instantly play back radio or phone communications, a critical feature dispatchers need in emergency situations. We also found that the USPP faces other ongoing challenges with the recorder, to include monitoring and maintenance, records retention, and IT approvals. We made five recommendations to the U.S. Park Police. The USPP has addressed each of our recommendations, and we consider them closed.

#### *Damage to NPS Property During First Amendment Events*

According to the *Events Planning Guide*, if the NPS identifies damage caused by the event, the permittee is responsible for all costs associated with the damage, including damage caused by demonstrations protected under the First Amendment.<sup>28</sup>

Because the Division of Permits Management does not have a system in place to track damages that have occurred from First Amendment events, we asked the Chief of the Division of Permits Management to provide information about past events during which damage occurred. According to this official’s recollection, and discussions with the Superintendent of the White House and President’s Park, the First Amendment events listed in Figure 1 resulted in damage to NPS property. NPS provided documentation showing the total estimated damages of \$317,694 for these events.

**Figure 1: Division of Permits Management First Amendment Event Damage Estimates**

| Date and Location of Event   | Damages Amount   |
|--|------------------|
| January 6, 2021, Ellipse and National Mall<br>November 30, 2020–January 1, 2021, Ellipse<br>December 10, 2020–December 19, 2020, Ellipse <sup>29</sup> | \$273,765        |
| November 4, 2023, Lafayette Park   | \$20,432         |
| November 14, 2023, National Mall <sup>30</sup>   | \$2,600          |
| June 8, 2024, Lafayette Park   | \$9,615          |
| July 24, 2024, Columbus Circle   | \$11,282         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$317,694</b> |

<sup>27</sup> *Review of the U.S. Park Police’s Communications Recording System in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*, available at Review of the U.S. Park Police’s Communications Recording System in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area (doiioig.gov).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> The total estimated damages include \$213,185 at the Ellipse South Quadrant, \$13,300 at the Ellipse Green Roadway, and \$47,280 at the National Mall Plant Library. According to the Superintendent of the White House and President’s Park, the estimated damages at the Ellipse South Quadrant and the Green Roadway may include damages from all three events at the Ellipse. This is because two events took place prior to the January 6 demonstration, and NPS did not assess the damages from those events.

In our prior review of the NPS' actions related to the demonstration on the Ellipse on January 6, 2021, we found that the NPS identified over \$213,000 in damages to the Ellipse turf caused by the demonstration. NPS, however, failed to retain prevent photographs it took to document condition of the site prior to the demonstration and thus made the decision not to attempt to recover costs for damages. Without the photos, the NPS determined it did not have sufficient evidence to attribute the damages to the demonstration.

In our most recent inspection, we reported that despite being authorized to recoup damages from First Amendment permittees, we found no evidence that NPS pursued this course of action. An attorney from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of the Solicitor, who has over 20 years of experience with NPS' First Amendment activities, told us that NPS has explored the possibility of recouping damages from First Amendment events over the last 15 years. The attorney stated that various discussions with colleagues in the U.S. Department of Justice over that time have caused NPS law enforcement to prioritize identifying and prosecuting<sup>31</sup> individuals that caused the damage rather than pursuing permit organizers.

This concludes my testimony, and I look forward to answering your questions.

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The following document was submitted as an attachment to Mr. Greenblatt's testimony.

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<sup>30</sup> According to the Chief of the Division of Permits Management, the permittee voluntarily paid for these damages.

<sup>31</sup> This allows the Government to potentially seek restitution and deter future activity.



OFFICE OF  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of Audits, Inspections,  
and Evaluations



## FLASH REPORT: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S FIRST AMENDMENT PERMIT PROCESS

In accordance with Federal regulations,<sup>1</sup> the National Park Service (NPS) authorizes the use of designated park areas for public assemblies, demonstrations, and other public expressions of views protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>2</sup> First Amendment activities in NPS-managed parks include distribution of "printed matter" and other message-bearing items, speechmaking, marching, picketing, and religious services.

Governing Federal regulations<sup>3</sup> require that groups consisting of more than 25 people<sup>4</sup> wanting to engage in First Amendment activities at NPS-managed parks obtain a First Amendment permit from NPS. According to NPS policy,<sup>5</sup> the permit process is intended to ensure public safety and resource protection and to avoid conflicts with other permitted activities. The relevant NPS policy states, "No group wishing to assemble lawfully may be discriminated against or denied the right of assembly provided that all permit conditions are met."<sup>6</sup>

Several NPS-permitted First Amendment demonstration events in the National Capital Region have resulted in damages to U.S. Government property. For example, on January 6, 2021, an NPS-permitted demonstration at the Ellipse,<sup>7</sup> which is part of the President's Park, resulted in damage to the Ellipse and the National Mall.

More recently, on July 24, 2024, an NPS-permitted demonstration protesting the Prime Minister of Israel's speech to Congress resulted in demonstrators defacing monuments near Columbus Circle in Washington, DC. This demonstration raised congressional concerns regarding whether NPS has held permittees accountable for violating permit conditions and NPS' ability to provide adequate support for the U.S. Park Police (USPP).

We are issuing this flash report to summarize NPS' First Amendment permit process and how NPS manages events once it has approved permits. We also provide information on the improvements NPS told us it has made to the permit process because of recent events, as well as the challenges that NPS still faces.

<sup>1</sup> 36 C.F.R. §§ 2.51(a), (b)(1) and 7.96, which includes special permit regulations for the National Capital Region.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Const. amend. I.

<sup>3</sup> 36 C.F.R. §§ 2.51(b)(1) and 7.96(g)(2).

<sup>4</sup> 36 C.F.R. § 7.96 includes exceptions such as a permit requirement for any event that includes constructing a temporary structure, regardless of group size.

<sup>5</sup> NPS, *Management Policies 2006*, § 6.6.3, "First Amendment Activities."

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> The amended permit for the demonstration stated that the purpose was for a first amendment rally called the "March for Trump" to demand transparency and protect election integrity.

### Definitions

The **First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution** states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

An **NPS permit** is written authorization to conduct an activity on NPS-administered land with conditions for using the park that take into consideration public safety, resource protection, and established park purposes.

Superintendents must **designate park areas** as available for demonstrations, for the sale or distribution of printed matter, and for the free distribution of other message-bearing items.

**Printed matter** means message-bearing printed material such as books, pamphlets, magazines, or leaflets, provided that the matter is not solely commercial advertisement.

**Other message-bearing items** that are not "printed matter" and are not solely commercial advertisement include but are not limited to readable electronic media such as CDs, DVDs, and flash drives; clothing and accessories such as hats and key chains; buttons; pins; and bumper stickers.

The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II15/20241210/117646/HHRG-118-II15-Wstate-GreenblattM-20241210.pdf>

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MARK GREENBLATT, INSPECTOR  
GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

**Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman**

*Question 1. Can you describe some of the improvements the Division of Permits Management is considering for the First Amendment permit process?*

Answer. According to the Chief of the Division of Permits Management, in response to First Amendment events that resulted in civil unrest and to improve the permit process, the National Park Service (NPS) has implemented or is in the process of implementing policy changes to the permit process. Specifically, the Division of Permits Management implemented:

- A new requirement that applicants must specify on their permit application the exact date and location of their event. NPS told us that many applicants do not list a specific date or location, which results in the permit staff spending significant time and resources to deconflict the date and location. According to the updated policy, the Division of Permits Management's previous practice was to provide provisional authorization to applicants who submitted applications with nonspecific dates and locations. Acceptance of those nonspecific permit applications resulted in challenges and delays for both the Division of Permits Management and USPP in managing permits, events, and demonstrations.
- A new requirement that applicants wishing to change the date of their event must submit a new application rather than amending their existing application. Previously, applicants amended their original application, which presented problems when applicants changed the date just a few days prior to a scheduled event. This had an adverse effect on the Division of Permits Management completing a full review of the documents related to the application.
- A requirement that there must be two NPS event compliance monitors at an event instead of one. A June 2024 permitted demonstration at Lafayette Park (during which a compliance monitor was by himself and was assaulted) reinforced the need for this requirement.

Additionally, the Division of Permits Management:

- Is in the process of updating the permit application to include language that would require the applicants to certify all the information provided in the permit application is complete and correct, and the permittee has not included false or misleading information or statements. This change occurred as a result of our report on the Department of the Interior's actions related to January 6, 2021.<sup>1</sup>
- Is updating and solidifying its event guidelines to make sure that written policies and standard operating procedures are accurate and up to date.

In addition, the Lieutenant of the U.S. Park Police's (USPP) Special Events Unit informed us that for some events, NPS requires the permittees to furnish their own volunteers as unarmed marshals to help with crowd control, including assisting with participants staying on the designated route during marches. Attorneys from the Office of the Solicitor told us that due to past issues (e.g., marshals who were not responsive to USPP or who participated in illegal conduct during the events), in August 2024, NPS began requiring the permittee to provide contact information for lead or chief marshals and information showing the specific geographic areas where those individuals have been assigned. According to these attorneys, the change will ensure that (1) marshals are dispersed at specific areas known to NPS permit staff and USPP; (2) NPS permit staff and USPP have the ability to directly contact a known person in each area of the event; and (3) permittees have control over their marshals in each area to give direction, provide for participant safety, and prevent illegal or damaging behavior. An attorney from the Office of the Solicitor told us that such a requirement is intended to compel the permittees to make good faith efforts to control their own crowds.

<sup>1</sup> Review of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Actions Related to January 6, 2021 (Report No. 21-0286), issued December 2023, available at <https://www.doi.gov/reports/special-review/review-us-department-interiors-actions-related-january-6-2021>.

*Question 2. Do you have any further recommendations for the National Park Service to improve coordination with law enforcement throughout the public gathering permitting process?*

Answer. We do not have any further recommendations for NPS to improve coordination with law enforcement throughout the public gathering permitting process, based on the oversight work we have completed to date. We will, however, remain attentive to this issue and make recommendations in the future as appropriate. We are also available for further discussions on this topic with the Subcommittee.

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Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Greenblatt. I now recognize Mr. Cuvelier for his 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CHARLES CUVELIER, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
VISITOR AND RESOURCE PROTECTION, NATIONAL PARK  
SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. CUVELIER. Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today regarding recent protests on Federal lands in Washington, DC.

Across the nation, the Department of the Interior employs nearly 3,000 law enforcement officers to protect visitors, critical national infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources on Federal and tribal lands. Within the National Park Service, both law enforcement rangers and the United States Park Police carry out this vital role.

The U.S. Park Police, established by President George Washington in 1791, is a premier law enforcement organization dedicated to providing quality law enforcement to safeguard lives, protect national treasures and symbols of democracy, and preserve natural and cultural resources. The Park Police primarily oversees law enforcement on national park lands in Washington, DC, New York City, and San Francisco, but also provides critical support to Federal, tribal, state, and local partners around the country.

With specialized training in handling events that involve civil disobedience, the U.S. Park Police works closely with these inter-agency partners during every large-scale demonstration in the Washington, DC area. This year, there have been several of those events.

The Department is committed to ensuring that citizens are free to safely exercise their rights of free speech and assembly, in accordance with the Constitution and the law. There were no unanswered requests for additional resources or support for the demonstrations from the U.S. Park Police.

However, in a public protest in June and July, certain demonstrators did violate the law by committing vandalism, theft, and assault on Park Police officers. These acts, and all violence in all forms, particularly against law enforcement officers, are abhorrent. The Department has and continues to fully condemn that behavior.

At the same time, we recognize free speech is a fundamental constitutional right, ensuring that all Americans can express their beliefs, question authority, and participate in public discourse without fear of government retaliation. The National Park Service is charged with facilitating First Amendment activities to ensure that

Americans have the ability to exercise their First Amendment rights, while providing for public safety and protection of resources.

The USPP, our Park Police, is actively collaborating with several other law enforcement agencies and the United States Attorney's Office in an effort to investigate, identify, and prosecute those involved in the unlawful events at Columbus Circle. In coordination with the FBI, a public bulletin was issued seeking assistance in identifying several individuals. To date, four arrests have been made. Charges included an assault on a police officer, damage to government property, and second degree theft of government property. Three other individuals are under various stages of investigation, court review, or prosecution.

The Park Service has been working to implement strategies and safeguards to minimize future incidents. For example, given the aggressive actions of individuals at these protests, we are exploring ways to modify permit conditions to provide that permittees and applicants who have previously held permits ensure their participants behave lawfully and inform participants of prohibited activity. Conversations are ongoing regarding the appropriate use and deployment of additional equipment, including anti-scale fencing and other icon-hardening barriers.

It is important to note that the Department has recently undertaken specific actions to enhance the trust afforded to our law enforcement workforce; support the safety, health, and wellness of officers; and ensure that law enforcement programs continue to effectively provide for safe, equitable, access to public lands. At the direction of Secretary Haaland and after a rigorous research and outreach process, the Department's Law Enforcement Task Force issued 12 recommendations in a 2023 report. Among these is a commitment to enhance training opportunities for Park Police personnel and other DOI law enforcement and permit-monitoring personnel in the Washington, DC area on issues such as civil disobedience.

Often underlying these efforts is the need for greater funding. For Fiscal Year 2024, the President's budget requested an increase of \$5.365 million for Park Police capacity needs, and to support additional recruit classes, and \$6.106 million more to cover the increased cost of paying benefits. In total, a 9.3 percent increase from Fiscal Year 2023 enacted in appropriations.

Congress kept overall funding flat for the Park Police in its Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations. Funding uncertainty is continuing in Fiscal Year 2025. The Fiscal Year 2025 President's budget request proposed a combined net increase of \$10.16 million for the Park Police to cover the re-baselined Fiscal Year 2024 and 2025 pay and benefit cost increases, restore lost capacity, and provide for increased funding for the upcoming presidential inauguration.

H.R. 8998, the Department of the Interior Environmental and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2025, which passed the House on July 24, 2024, does not provide additional funding for any of these Park Police needs. Though the Department welcomes the \$5 million in additional funding for inauguration, which is included in the current continuing resolution, a portion of which will fund law enforcement activities.



The Park Service protects some of the most significant and meaningful icons and symbols of the United States, and we continue to fulfill this critical mission on behalf of the American public. Thank you for your interest and support of the National Park Service and the United States Park Police.

Chairman Gosar, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cuvelier follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHARLES CUVELIER, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
VISITOR AND RESOURCE PROTECTION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today regarding recent protests on federal lands in Washington, DC.

Across the Nation, the Department of the Interior employs nearly 3,000 law enforcement officers to protect visitors, critical national infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources on federal and Tribal lands. Within the National Park Service (NPS), both law enforcement rangers and United States Park Police (USPP) carry out this vital role.

The USPP, established by President George Washington in 1791, is a premier law enforcement organization, dedicated to providing quality law enforcement to safeguard lives, protect national treasures and symbols of democracy, and preserve natural and cultural resources. The USPP primarily oversees law enforcement on national park lands in Washington, DC, New York City, and San Francisco, but also provides critical support to federal, Tribal, state and local partners around the country.

With specialized training in handling events that involve civil disobedience, the USPP works closely with these interagency partners during every large-scale demonstration or event in the Washington, DC area. This year there have been several of these events. The Department is committed to ensuring that citizens can safely exercise their rights of free speech and assembly in accordance with the Constitution and the law. There were no unanswered requests for additional resources and support for these demonstrations from the USPP. However, at public protests in June and July, certain demonstrators did violate the law by committing vandalism, theft, and assault on USPP officers. These acts and violence in all forms, particularly against law enforcement officers, are abhorrent. The Department has condemned and continues to fully condemn this behavior. At the same time, we recognize free speech is a fundamental constitutional right, ensuring all Americans can express their beliefs, question authority, and participate in public discourse without fear of government retaliation. The National Park Service is charged with facilitating First Amendment activities to ensure that Americans have the ability to exercise their First Amendment rights while providing for public safety and protection of resources.

The USPP is actively collaborating with several state, local, and Federal law enforcement agencies as well as the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, in an effort to investigate, identify, and prosecute those involved in the unlawful events at Columbus Circle. In coordination with the Federal Bureau Investigation, a public bulletin has been issued seeking assistance in identifying several individuals. To date, four arrests have been made. Charges include assault on a police officer, damage to government property, and second-degree theft of government property. Three other individuals are under various stages of investigation, court review, or prosecution.

The NPS has been working with the USPP to continue evaluating the specific circumstances and to implement strategies and safeguards to minimize future incidents. For example, we are exploring ways to modify permit conditions to provide that permittees—and applicants who have previously held permits—ensure their participants behave lawfully and inform participants of prohibited activity. Also, conversations are ongoing regarding the appropriate use and deployment of additional equipment, including anti-scale fencing and other icon-hardening barriers. The NPS has previously provided technical assistance to Congress regarding potential supplemental appropriations to cover this type of protective and icon-hardening

equipment. We would be more than happy to work with Congress to continue this dialogue.

The Department strongly supports our law enforcement personnel. At the direction of Secretary Haaland, and after a rigorous research and outreach process, the Department's Law Enforcement Task Force issued 12 recommendations in its 2023 Report (2023 DOI-LETF Report) with a focus on ways to enhance the trust afforded to our law enforcement workforce, support the safety, health and wellness of officers, and ensure that law enforcement programs effectively continue to provide for safe and equitable access to public lands and the free exercise of fundamental rights in public spaces. Important among these is the commitment to enhance training opportunities for USPP personnel and other DOI law enforcement and permit-monitoring personnel in the Washington, DC, area on issues such as civil disobedience.

The 2023 DOI-LETF Report identified a number of issues related to the recruitment and retention of law enforcement workforce that the Department is currently pursuing, including ensuring that the Department has adequate staffing to respond to, and discourage, incidents and enhance the resiliency of the workforce. Often underlying these efforts is the need for greater funding.

As with other DOI law enforcement programs, staffing levels within the USPP have declined over 15% over the last decade, as funding provided through the annual appropriations process has not been sufficient to meet the program's capacity and fixed cost needs. The 2023 DOI-LETF Report identified that when annual hiring does not keep pace with attrition, and staffing levels fall, the impacts on the remaining workforce increase the challenges of officer retention, leading to a self-reinforcing cycle. The 2023 DOI-LETF Report additionally found that inadequate staffing is the "largest single factor contributing to stress, mental health concerns, feeling unsafe on the job, and a lack of work-life balance for DOI law enforcement officers."

In FY 2024, the President's Budget requested an increase of \$5.365 million for USPP capacity needs and to support additional recruit classes, and \$6.106 million more to cover the increased costs of pay and benefits—in total, a 9.3% increase from FY 2023 enacted appropriations. Congress, kept overall funding flat for the USPP in its FY 2024 appropriations further exacerbating USPP's ability to maintain staffing levels. In order to operate within these budgetary constraints, the USPP needed to hold vacant previously funded positions. The only source of these positions is new recruit classes to fill behind officers that have separated or retired. A recruit class costs more than \$2.5 million, including costs for background investigations, medical exams, field training, and other support requirements. Lapsing two recruit classes in FY 2024 allowed the USPP to save roughly \$5 million in discretionary appropriations costs in order to meet their budget. In addition, other non-salary components of the USPP's budget are also increasing year-over-year.

This funding uncertainty is continuing in FY 2025. The FY 2025 President's Budget Request proposes a combined net increase of \$10.16 million for the USPP to cover the re-baselined FY 2024 and FY 2025 pay and benefit cost increases, restore lost capacity, and provide for increased funding for the upcoming Presidential inauguration. H.R. 8998, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2025, which passed the House on July 24, 2024, does not provide additional funding for any of these USPP needs, though the Department welcomes the \$5 million in funding for the inauguration included in the current continuing resolution, a portion of which will fund law enforcement activities. In contrast, S. 4802, reported out by the Senate Committee on Appropriations on July 25, 2024, provides the full \$2.9 million requested for FY 2025 pay and benefit cost increases, as well as the full \$2.4 million requested for the law enforcement requirements needed for the upcoming Presidential inauguration. The Senate bill also provides an increase of \$25.6 million across parks and programs to partially restore the operational capacity lost in FY 2024 due to absorption of the more than \$100 million in additional pay, benefits, and other fixed costs across the NPS, including the USPP.

While Congress has not provided the requested increases in discretionary appropriations for the USPP, the NPS has utilized other sources of funding to increase USPP staffing capacity. The NPS allocated \$29 million of Inflation Reduction Act (Section 50223) funding to the USPP to support the initial hiring and equipping of a recruit class in FY 2023, and another recruit class in FY 2024, and will cover the salary of these sworn officers for the next several years. Without these Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds, the USPP would have experienced a further decrease in staffing. With the addition of the 2 recruit classes supported by IRA funds, there have been 7.5 recruit classes in this Administration compared with 5 during the

previous Administration. The capacity provided by the IRA will be temporary unless Congress appropriates an increase to their base funding.

The USPP also faces challenges with pay disparity in relation to other federal or state law enforcement entities. The 2023 DOI-LETF Report found that DOI's compensation packages for law enforcement officers "make it difficult to compete with other law enforcement organizations when recruiting new officers" and also "accounts for some loss of personnel, particularly in urban areas and Tribal communities." Competitive compensation is foundational to the retention of an effective law enforcement workforce. At the same time, as discussed above, if the pay scale is increased without additional funding, law enforcement will face additional limits to its financial ability to recruit new employees and function operationally.

The USPP pay scale is set by statute, and it is lower than the pay scale for certain other Federal police officers, such as Secret Service Uniformed Division officers. When competing for the same applicant recruits, this pay disparity has a negative impact on USPP recruitment and hiring. Similarly, the USPP lacks pay parity with its local law enforcement partners. For example, the starting annual salary for USPP officers in the San Francisco Field Office is \$75,253, while the San Francisco Police make \$103,116 and the Oakland Police make \$102,000, challenging our ability to recruit and retain officers.

Within this challenging financial environment, the NPS has taken a number of actions with the funding that is available to improve USPP morale. The NPS Office of Workforce Development has focused on USPP officer recruitment by attending over 20 events to promote the USPP to seek quality candidates. The USPP promotes career development within the organization. In 2023, 24 officers were transferred to specialized positions and the Master Patrol Officer (MPO) program was reestablished with nine MPO positions created. These 33 positions include technician pay. The USPP has used monetary and non-monetary awards to recognize employees for their exceptional work. Also, the Department has supported the use of student loan forgiveness and student loan repayment programs, using performance and achievement-based cash or time off awards, offering advanced training opportunities, and offering on-the-job training through detail assignments and temporary promotions.

The NPS protects some of the most significant and meaningful icons and symbols of the United States, and we continue to fulfill this critical mission on behalf of the American public. Thank you for your interest in and support of the National Park Service and the United States Park Police.

Chairman Gosar, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO CHARLES CUVELIER, ASSOCIATE  
DIRECTOR, VISITOR AND RESOURCE PROTECTION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S.  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

**Mr. Cuvelier did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.**

#### **Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman**

*Question 1. Does NPS often have to revoke approved public gathering permits? How many revocations occurred during 2024?*

*Question 2. On the text of the public gathering permit for July 24, it states that the "organizer refused to provide specific locations for onsite contacts." Generally, why does the National Park Service require onsite contacts for such an event?*

*2a) Why did ANSWER Coalition's failure to provide onsite contacts not result in denial of their permit application?*

*Question 3. I understand that after a first amendment public gathering, there is an evaluation of law enforcement activities to document best practices and lessons learned with the Special Events Unit. Can you share the lessons learned from the evaluation for the July 24 event, related to law enforcement?*

*Question 4. Do you believe that, as of today, there are enough US Park Police sworn officers to effectively carry out the agency's mission to protect our public lands, and prevent events such as those on July 24?*

*4a) Does the National Park Service have any plans over the next year to help address the shortage of Park Police officers and secure National Park lands?*

*Question 5. Does ANSWER Coalition or any other organizations under the Shut It Down for Palestine movement have pending, or approved, permits for public gatherings with the National Park Service?*

*5a) If so, what date is the public gathering permit application for, and which group submitted the application*

#### **Questions Submitted by Representative D'Esposito**

*Question 1. If you could make any improvements to the public gathering permitting process to make it more transparent, and to further include law enforcement expertise in the process, what would you do?*

*Question 2. For what reasons would the National Park Service deny a public gathering permit to an individual or organization? Please walk us through what would contribute to such a decision.*

*Question 3. Without naming specific individuals, has the National Park Service ever denied an organization or individual a public gathering permit based on a past history of violence or conduct?*

*Question 4. The Park Police have repeatedly criticized the lack of resources provided by the Department, and, as a result, diminishing morale throughout the ranks.*

*Question 5. In the Department's estimate, how many sworn Park Police Officers are needed to effectively carry out its mission? Please break down your response by the three USPP jurisdictions in the District, New York City, and San Francisco. And, how did the National Park Service arrive at these numbers?*

*Question 6. In any of the last four fiscal years, has the Department specifically asked Congress for additional appropriations to address the officer staffing crisis at the Park Police? If so, please describe those requests. If not, why not?*

*Question 7. In the last four years has the Department reached out to Congress at all, in any respect, to request additional resources of any kind specifically for the Park Police?*

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Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Cuvelier. I am now going to go to the question period. I am going to recognize the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman from Arkansas.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Gosar, and thank you again to the witnesses.

Mr. Greenblatt, if I understood your testimony correctly and your report that you issued yesterday, there are regulations in place and permittees technically are responsible if they create damages, even if the Park Service isn't currently pursuing those damages.

Mr. GREENBLATT. That appears to be correct, yes, that all the predicate is there in terms of notice and in the regs, yes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. But there is also currently not any kind of process in place to track damages.

Mr. GREENBLATT. That is what we found over the course of our inspection, yes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, let's focus on that area for a minute. I think everybody would agree that our country uniquely allows people to gather and to protest. And really, when it is a good protest, probably nothing says America quite like a good protest. But I categorize that with "good protest," when people follow the rules, they don't infringe on other people's rights, and when they don't destroy public property.

But I think everybody would also agree that, if public property is destroyed, the taxpayer shouldn't be on the hook for repairing that public property. Are you aware of any other instances where,

if somebody intentionally destroyed public property on Park Service land, that the Park Service wouldn't go after them to pay for the damages?

Mr. GREENBLATT. My understanding is that in other contexts, not in First Amendment events, but, say, other events, business events or weddings, say, if there is damage, that the Park Service does pursue those. We didn't do an analysis of that, but that is our understanding, is that First Amendment events are treated separately.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, even unintentional damage, like——

Mr. GREENBLATT. Correct. That is my understanding.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, do you think it would be good if the Park Service put in place some kind of process to track damages and to actually try to recoup these damages and maybe, if they have a list of people who have damaged Park Service property, to at least not allow them to have permits down the road?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Well, certainly the capturing of the data related to how many First Amendment permits there are, where are they, what are the damages that flow from them, I think that we did not make a formal recommendation in here. But one of the themes that emerged is that I think there could be a better effort to get their arms around the scope of the issue, and then that will help decision-makers both in NPS, in the Park Police, but also here on the Hill to make those types of decisions because they will have better data.

That is one of the key things, is that it was a lot of recollection, as opposed to here is the spreadsheet of the damage over the last 15 years. So, that is something that we think always drives better decision-making is keeping track, certainly.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Cuvelier, did anyone at the Park Service have concerns about granting the permit to ANSWER Coalition, given their violent history during protest?

And if so, who raised those concerns, and about what?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, sir.

Our pre-event planning, based upon the permit application, included our interagency partners such as the Secret Service Uniform Division, the Metropolitan Police Department, fire department, EMS, our intelligence unit with the U.S. Park Police, and our special events unit with the Park Police.

We base our issuance of the permit based upon what the applicant has put forth there. ANSWER Coalition had included their attorney, as well as other members of the organization in that early planning period, clarifying what their permit request was. We initially partially denied it because the location they had asked for was already permitted for another event. And consistent with 36 CFR and 7.96, provided the alternative location of Columbus Circle. We rely upon intelligence to drive our decision-making. There was no actionable intelligence related to the permitted event to deny a permit or otherwise adjudicate it. We were informed by the ANSWER Coalition that they would provide an adequate number of marshals to conduct themselves in good order as part of the permit.

Initially, when the First Amendment demonstration got underway, there was no violence. It did begin in good order, sir. But for those reasons in the early planning stages, there was no reason to deny them a permit.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, how does National Park Service define whether a proposed demonstration reasonably appears to present clear and present danger?

Mr. CUVELIER. We really rely upon 36 CFR 7.96, that regulatory scheme is based upon case law, in which—

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, is an applicant's history with public gathering permits relevant to this analysis?

Mr. CUVELIER. We rely upon the applicant submitted at the time, and if we have actionable direct intelligence of a contemporaneous nature, then we would act upon that.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The next person we are going to go to who has a time schedule is the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Yakym.

Mr. YAKYM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for yielding time, and thank you for holding this hearing today.

Like you and other members on this panel, I have several questions about the events of July 25, when a large group of radical anti-Israel protesters at Washington, DC's Union Station, just 400 yards from the U.S. Capitol complex, vandalized government property with pro-terrorist slogans. They violently assaulted police officers, and they intimidated anyone in the vicinity who did not agree with them. They even pulled down the American flag, burnt it, and replaced it on the pole with a Palestinian flag.

I was proud to be among a group of members that drove the short distance down to Union Station that night, and we surveyed the damage, and we raised the American flag back to its rightful place.

Mr. Cuvelier, why did the U.S. Park Police only have 29 officers to monitor what was expected to be a 5,000-person protest?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, sir.

In our planning for the event, it was considered a full force commitment. We committed 174 officers of the force to participate in the event, and were assigned various duties and responsibilities with the permitted activity. A full force commitment means we ask officers to surrender their days off or time off.

And I want to commend all of the force who consistently do this to provide for the number of First Amendment or other special events that occur within the National Capital Region.

But in fact, we had 174 personnel committed to the event.

Mr. YAKYM. So, you had 174 personnel actually on site?

Mr. CUVELIER. They were assigned a number of different functions within the planning cycle for the entire length and physical footprint of the—

Mr. YAKYM. With the 5,000 people actually on site, how many officers were on site to protect the nation's capital at Union Station?

Mr. CUVELIER. Again, sir, we had 174 personnel assigned to the event. Within the parameters of the permit, geographic location, the permit incurred a number of streets, sidewalks, as well as

Columbus Circle. Then, in particular, we included our specialized units such as the Civil Disturbance Unit and other resources as part of that event.

Mr. YAKYM. But where things were actually going wrong on site at Union Station, how many officers were on site at Union Station, where our American flag was torn down and burned to the ground?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sir, I am trying my best to answer your question. There were 174 for the total event. Some of—

Mr. YAKYM. Look, this is a very simple question here.

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes, sir.

Mr. YAKYM. I understand there were 174 people in total for the event. How many people were on site where the American flag was torn down and burned, and then the Palestinian flag was subsequently raised? It is very simple.

Mr. CUVELIER. Sure. I will get back with you to the best of my ability with that particular question.

Mr. YAKYM. But how do you not know that answer?

Mr. CUVELIER. I am aware of the number of individuals that were assigned to the detail, that were in various functions to ensure public safety of which were at Union Station, including, again, our specialized units such as the Civil Disobedience Unit, the command and general staff officers of the Park Police, all attached to that event.

Mr. YAKYM. Inspector General, so Mr. Greenblatt, I know you have already started looking into this. You have already, it sounds like, opened an investigation, started to maybe even publish an additional report. Do you know the answer to that question, how many officers were actually on site?

Mr. GREENBLATT. We don't. We interacted with the Park Service, and they told us that the number 29 that was reported was not correct. But I don't know the specific answer.

Mr. YAKYM. So, if we know that the number 29 is not correct, we have to know then how many people were on site to protect Union Station. Do we not?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sir, again, I am sharing with you there were 174 personnel assigned to the overall First Amendment permitted event, including perimeter, interior, and the various roles and functions—

Mr. YAKYM. Next question. What fines or punishments were levied against the ANSWER Coalition organizers for the damage that they caused?

Mr. CUVELIER. Currently, we have investigations underway identifying the individuals that were responsible for damages to property. As I shared earlier in my testimony, four individuals have been arrested and charged. If during that criminal proceedings process the Department of Justice can support restitution, that would be part of the criminal proceedings.

Mr. YAKYM. I am still trying to understand how a permit was issued to a group that is known to cause problems in the past. In the remaining time that I have, do we anticipate that this group or a group under the same people with a different name would ever be issued a permit to operate again on public land, given their lack of respect for the American flag?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sir, per 36 CFR 7.96, that is the legal regulatory scheme for adjudicating permits within 24 hours. Unless they are denied, they are deemed approved. So, a future applicant, any applicant, has a deemed approved permit when they make the application—

Mr. YAKYM. Yes, I don't even know what that means.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Montana, Mr. Rosendale, is now recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for holding this important hearing.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the American taxpayers allocated nearly \$7 billion in discretionary and operational funding for the National Park Service. If Congress expects the public to support significant investments, it is our responsibility to ensure that these cherished landmarks and parks are not misused as platforms for anti-American activities by foreign-aligned individuals.

While foreign nationals are welcome to visit and appreciate our parks, they must do so with respect for our country, its lands, and its people. As a staunch supporter of the First Amendment and the right to peacefully protest, I emphasize that this right does not extend to violence or the desecration of our national symbols or our public property.

Unfortunately, during the recent events, rioters violated the conditions of their legally-obtained permit. This raises critical questions about the responses of both the agency that issued the permit and the local police who appeared to stand by as one of the capital's most iconic landmarks was desecrated, a site that serves as the first impression for many visitors who come to our city.

I would like to know how many dual citizens or non-American nationals were involved in this protest turned riot, and what penalties they are facing; have they been deported yet and, if not, when; and what steps this Committee can take to prevent such incidents from taking place in the future. Our significant landmarks must remain protected, clean, and free from the malicious intent of foreign actors.

Thank you for the witnesses for joining us today, and I look forward to having your comments.

Mr. Cuvelier, I want to stay on this line of questioning trying to identify exactly what the process is. I like process. That way we have some kind of consistency, the consistent application of law. And recognizing that the great risk of jeopardizing First Amendment rights, are there clear guidelines which would give you the ability to deny a permit?

What are the main points? And why weren't they used on the request from the ANSWER Coalition, an organization with a history of violent and destructive actions?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for your question, sir.

The criteria for which a permit could be denied is expressed in 36 CFR 7.96.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Could you give us just a couple of points, three points that you look to and say this is what we are basing this on?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sure. One would be that the location is already permitted for another event or activity, as I indicated earlier.



The second would be that there is a clear and present danger. That extension of that authority goes with the officer in charge during the event, which is what occurred in this case. When the clear and present danger occurred about 40 minutes into the permitted event, they then revoked the permit. So, there is a revocation clause, if you will, within the permitting process.

Mr. ROSENDALE. But is there language in there that gives you the ability by identifying a group that has demonstrated violence and destruction previously to give you the ability to deny that permit from the start?

Mr. CUVELIER. There is nothing in the regulation that indicates prior conduct would be a cause for future permitted events.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. You noted that four individuals involved in this protest have been arrested, while three additional suspects remain under investigation. Why has it taken 6 months to complete the investigation for the three suspects?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question.

We have worked with our partners with the FBI who issued this public bulletin that provided photographs asking for the public contributing to help us identify. That is what led to several of these arrests. We appreciate the public's participation in providing those tips and leads. We have been working with the Department of Justice, as well, with regard to ongoing investigations.

Although the First Amendment permit has ended, the investigation is ongoing, sir.

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, regarding the four arrested individuals, are all four American citizens?

Mr. CUVELIER. I do not have that information in front of me, sir. I will have to take that back.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Four people, and you don't have that information available to you right now?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sir, I just did not bring—

Mr. ROSENDALE. The first four arrests that were made, you don't have that. So, we can't determine my next question, which is were any of the non-citizens unlawfully present in the United States at the time of their involvement?

Mr. CUVELIER. I do not know the citizen status of those who were arrested, sir.

Mr. ROSENDALE. By any chance, Mr. Greenblatt, would you have that information?

Mr. GREENBLATT. No, sir. We were not involved in the investigation, so, unfortunately, I don't have—

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, we don't even know right now if any of the people that were participating in this were non-citizens or not.

Mr. Chair, I see my time is very nearly expired. I will yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Montana. The gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Collins, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS. I took too much time off.

[Laughter.]

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was sitting here trying to make some notes and ask a few things of my Chairman. Is it Cavalier?

Mr. CUVELIER. It is Cuvelier, sir, thank you.

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Cuvelier, does the National Park Service modify the terms and conditions of public gathering permits based on the group that is requesting the permit?

Like, for instance, would a group with a history of violence or destruction of Federal property be subject to additional terms and conditions to ensure the preservation and safety of Federal lands?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, sir. Yes. In fact, since the July events, we are putting as a condition of permits the need to not only provide the marshals for your event, but the names of those individuals who would be the lead so we have a point of contact should that become necessary during the——

Mr. COLLINS. So, the marshals are part of the group, right? They are not part of your people?

Mr. CUVELIER. They are a part of the group. They are non-law enforcement personnel.

Mr. COLLINS. So, self law enforcement.

What tools does the National Park Service have to mitigate violence from radical groups that have no intention of conducting a peaceful permit?

Mr. CUVELIER. We rely upon the United States Park Police Intel Unit and our collaborative network of interagency partners, including the Metropolitan Police Department, the United States Secret Service. It is dependent a little bit on the event in terms of who has primary lead, but all those groups come together to share relevant intelligence information.

Mr. COLLINS. Yes, I think, if I remember right, when we got there that night to put those flags back up, that was Metro Police that was there. You all weren't around.

Had the ANSWER Coalition been cited for permit violations with the National Park Service during any of the previous events?

Mr. CUVELIER. ANSWER Coalition, as an organization, has not been cited. No, sir.

Mr. COLLINS. OK. Well, I have down that it was.

Are you all considering changing any of your permit process at all?

Mr. CUVELIER. With each event, we undergo an after-action review to figure out if there are better ways we can operate in the operating environment, as was expressed in the flash report provided by the IG, whether we can also improve the conditions of the permit to address some of the things, like as was described, bag drops that were made at a previous event so that those event organizers can make it clear to their participants what is allowable in the event, and then how to reduce the likelihood of that reoccurring, as an example, sir.

Mr. COLLINS. All right. So, the Shut it Down for Palestine event, even though they were hosted by ANSWER Coalition, and I think many other different groups participated, none of these groups are held liable for violating the terms of the permit. So, how do you intend on changing that?

Mr. CUVELIER. We need to work with our partners in the Solicitor's Office and the Department of Justice if we are going to seek restitution in any amount. So, we would seek the advice of agency counsel, as well as DOJ before pursuing some restitution.

Mr. COLLINS. But you think they ought to be held liable?

Mr. CUVELIER. If we put forth conditions of a permit and they are not met, we should do our best to ensure that conditions are met before or after the fact. Yes, sir.

Mr. COLLINS. I am not following.

Mr. CUVELIER. If a condition of the permit explicitly states, for instance, that you need to provide marshals, and you don't, we need to intervene and address that issue when it happens. If a condition of a permit relates to being held accountable for damages, we would again work with our DOJ partners to see if restitution can be made.

Mr. COLLINS. All right. Well, let me ask you. If you could make any improvements to the public gathering permit process to just make it more transparent, and to further include law enforcement expertise, what would you do? I mean, change the marshals, maybe?

Mr. CUVELIER. What we have tried to do is make it clear to the permittee their obligations and responsibility to notify their participants in advance, for instance, of what they can and cannot bring, that they may give us notice of who their marshal leads are so that they can be contacted in the event there is a need for them to maintain good order.

It is the primary responsibility of the permittee to be responsible for their participants.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will tell you what I think I have learned here in this short circle of answers is the fact that we rely on some self-governance out there. The man doesn't even know how many people were on site from the National Park Police during this thing. We don't pursue any violators. There is no process to recoup damages. But in typical bureaucrat fashion, the answer to all the questions is more money so that we can hire more people to watch what is going on.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cuvelier, I want to ask a question. In the IRA funds, there were \$500 million to the National Park Service for staffing. They decided to spend \$19 million on police. What did they do with the other \$481 million? What did they prioritize that money for?

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes, thank you for your question, sir.

Of the IRA funding that you are describing, \$29 million was allocated to the Park Police, which supports the——

Mr. STAUBER. \$29 million or \$19 million?

Mr. CUVELIER. \$29 million, sir.

Mr. STAUBER. OK. I had \$19 million.

Mr. CUVELIER. That is OK, \$29 million. That is about 47 officers that were put through basic training and will fund them through 2030.

Mr. STAUBER. OK, thank you.

I just want to make note, Mr. Chair, that the National Park System superintendent wished to testify today, but his participation was blocked by the Department of the Interior and the White House.

As I look at this situation, I have some notes here, but my colleagues have kind of changed my direction of questioning. Mr. Cuvelier, if you could do it over, what would you do different or better so the safety of the people would be paramount and there was no destruction of U.S. Government property? What would you have done better?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, sir.

We get about 400 permits a year for First Amendment activity, another 2,400 for special park uses.

Mr. STAUBER. I get that, I just want to know about this tragedy at Columbus Circle.

Mr. CUVELIER. In our planning process, we will seek to rely upon the best available contemporaneous intelligence information which will drive our planning cycle.

Mr. STAUBER. Did your intelligence work in this particular protest?

Mr. CUVELIER. The intelligence we had did not indicate that there was going to be a violent permitted event.

Mr. STAUBER. OK. When it started to get out of hand, were reinforcements called immediately? And where did they come from?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, sir.

The Park Police supervisor on duty has the ability to revoke a permit when the clear and present danger standard is met. They did that that day. That was about 30 to 40 minutes into the permitted event. There are requirements——

Mr. STAUBER. When you revoke the permit, does it automatically assume more personnel are going to be there to stop it?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you sir, yes. A couple of things have to happen. The Park Police needs to allow for an opportunity for those who want to leave the event to peacefully egress, right? We don't want to create further chaos on top of what is already unacceptable behavior.

Mr. STAUBER. Did you get additional resources once you revoked the permit? My question is, did you get immediate resources, other than the 29 that showed up?

Mr. CUVELIER. The officer on scene utilized the Civil Disturbance Unit to come in——

Mr. STAUBER. Did they show up?

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes, sir. They did.

Mr. STAUBER. And in a timely fashion?

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes, sir. They were a part of the incident.

Mr. STAUBER. Again, what else would you have done different?

Mr. CUVELIER. Again, as part of the planning cycle, what we are going to do is require the permit applicant to be informed as to what they need to tell their participants to discourage the bringing of whatever is prohibited for that event.

So, as was described in Mr. Greenblatt's testimony, the Secret Service event, there is a different threshold for what you can bring than, say, for instance, a venue that is open to the public. Making sure that——

Mr. STAUBER. Would you say it was a disgrace, what happened that day to the government property and the American flag being taken down and burned?

Mr. CUVELIER. Sir, as a member of the National Park Service who are charged under Congress' direction to protect natural and cultural resources, we don't like to see the destruction of any government property.

Mr. STAUBER. Was it a disgrace? Was it a disgrace that our flag was burned and decimated?

Mr. CUVELIER. I think it is important to know that the burning of the flag was not permitted under the event. It was, as we have described before, an abhorrent act in which we are trying to seek the individuals responsible for those actions.

Mr. STAUBER. I am very sorry that you can't answer that question, a very simple question. Was it a disgrace that the American flag was burned and stomped on? You can't answer that question. I find it very difficult. I love our flag.

Mr. CUVELIER. I agree with you, sir. I am a 26-year law enforcement, and I—

Mr. STAUBER. And I am 23 years. And for you not to be able to answer that, sir, it is very disheartening for me. I don't know what you are trying to protect. Who are you trying to protect? That is an easy answer.

Mr. Chair, I am disgusted. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Minnesota for being disgusted. The gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Carl, is up next.

Mr. CARL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Cuvelier, your name has been butchered so far, so I can't do any worse, right?

[Laughter.]

Mr. CARL. OK. As Ranking Member Stansbury pointed out January 6 and the events on January 6, I was in the middle of January 6. I know a little bit about January 6, and I was also on the Floor when we were reviewing video and we decided to go raise the flags. And I raced back to my office and grabbed three flags, and away we went. And I will tell you, it was a sight when we got there. It stunk. I don't know what they were throwing, but my guess is you all are right. It had burned stuff, and sprayed all over the statue out there.

But it was a great feeling when we got those three flags hoisted. And, of course, this old man, standing at the bottom of one of those flags, and I look, and all these Special Forces guys were standing around with their back to the flag, ready to defend it. That is America, that is America as we know it. And I am sorry you can't say that, and I understand it is a political position you are in. You have to be careful. But with that said, it was a proud moment for me as a Congressman.

I understand the chief of the U.S. Park Police, Chief Taylor, was interested in providing testimony at this hearing, but an agency decision was made for her not to testify today. Were you involved, sir? Were you involved in the law enforcement decision or operation related to this protest?

Did I make that clear? Were you involved in the law enforcement decision or operations related to this protest?

Mr. CUVELIER. I was not present on scene the day of the protest. I rely upon those frontline officers, supervisors who have command

responsibility for the other officers in the field to make the decision, sir.

Mr. CARL. Do you think that the perspectives of the Chief of Park Police is critical in this conversation today?

Mr. CUVELIER. The Chief of the U.S. Park Police commands the workforce and delegates her authority to her line officers.

Mr. CARL. Yes, sir, but it is important to hear that conversation today, correct?

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes, sir. I am here representing the Department of the Interior on her behalf.

Mr. CARL. OK, so you coordinated with the chief in preparation for this hearing. And if so, what is Chief Taylor's message to this Committee?

Mr. CUVELIER. I think we have expressed to the Committee our efforts to improve the permitting process. We have expressed to the Committee our interagency efforts which make this possible. We have expressed to the Committee the staffing commitments we have made for all permitted events, depending on scale, and how that represents sometimes a full force commitment. And we use the available resources we have, and I think those would be key messages for you, sir.

Mr. CARL. Does the Park Police keep track of groups, these previous threats to officers, and violence?

Mr. CUVELIER. We consider each permit on its own individual application. We don't retain records. It is based upon each applicant as it is submitted, sir.

Mr. CARL. You don't keep records on any of these individuals that cause problems?

Mr. CUVELIER. Our intelligence gathering must be contemporaneous with the event. That is that clear and present danger that was set forth in 36 CFR 7.96. So, we have to have actionable intelligence commensurate with the permitted event, and that drives our decision-making.

Mr. CARL. So, by a fluke I bumped into the administrator of the Capitol police, and I was kidding him about protesters on the way here, and asked him about them, and he said he knew most of them by their names. So, I would suggest that these same people that are being paid and keep reoccurring, we identify who they are.

On January 6, we went through everybody that came through the building, whether they were just tourists looking like 99 percent of them or the 1 percent that actually meant harm to this building or to our property, and they should be held liable just like these people should be held liable, and we should know who they are. We have face recognition. We have technology. We have everything to know who these people are, and we need a database. We need to start watching who they are because that is going to be our future if we are not careful, if we just keep letting it pass.

Does the Park Police provide any type of report or update to the National Park Service on groups or gatherings that turn violent?

Mr. CUVELIER. We do not have a regular recurring report. We do an intelligence brief on a regular recurring cycle based upon whatever is happening in our Park Service lands.

Mr. CARL. And the intelligence briefing, is that just within the Park Service?

Mr. CUVELIER. That is a product produced by the Intelligence Unit of the United States Park Police for force use.

Mr. CARL. OK. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman, I return my time.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you to the gentleman from Alabama. The gentlewoman from Iowa, Mrs. Miller-Meeks, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for allowing me to waive on to this important hearing today, important to me personally because I am a 24-year military veteran.

And on that day when I was crossing town and passed the flagpoles with a non-U.S. flag up there, I asked my staff if they had a flag so I could replace the flag. I didn't even know if I could do it, but apparently if violent protest groups can replace a flag, then I could certainly do it as a Member of Congress.

In the testimony we have heard today, we have learned that, unsurprisingly, the ANSWER Coalition is affiliated with multiple organizations that are part of a well-funded network with ties to hostile foreign governments and jihadist extremist groups. The Shut it Down for Palestine Coalition, whose membership includes the ANSWER Coalition, has orchestrated frequent protest activity, including blocking roadways, tunnels, and bridges across the country.

Mr. Greenblatt, I recognize the difficult line that you walk of protecting American citizens' constitutional rights while upholding law and order. As a veteran, I may not like the Supreme Court's ruling that burning and stomping on our flag is freedom of speech, but nonetheless I uphold their ruling. However, when people commit crimes in this country, they are liable to losing certain rights and privileges, depending on the nature of the crime.

Does a history of illegal activity factor at all into the United States Park Police's decision to issue a demonstration permit? And we may already have that answer from Mr. Cuvelier.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Yes, I believe that is a question for the Park Service in terms of their regs and policies.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. I understand, Mr. Cuvelier, that you don't keep records of groups and of activities. So, if you don't keep any records, then from who is actual intelligence obtained from?

Mr. CUVELIER. If an individual were convicted of a crime, there would be a record of that conviction. As far as organizational records, we do not maintain records on organizations. We base our permitting process, again, on what is codified in 7.96 of CFR and the applications permit and the pre-planning that goes into that application process.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. My apologies. I asked you from who is actual intelligence obtained from. You have violent groups, history of violence, history of destruction of property, history of support from terrorist organizations, known terrorist organizations, but yet you don't keep records but you receive intelligence. So, who provides that intelligence for you so that you can make a rational decision on who to give a permit to, especially if they have engaged in criminal activity in the past when trying to exert their First Amendment rights?

Mr. CUVELIER. Thank you for the question, ma'am.

We engage in an interagency planning effort. We draw on intelligence from all our interagency partners, be they the Capitol Police, the Metropolitan Police Department, Secret Service, and so that we all have visibility on all our different activities occurring in our jurisdictions. And that is one of the primary means in which we gather our intelligence.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. Then let me ask this question. If you don't keep records, and if those records from previous events are not kept in order to make a decision on granting a current permit, then is it necessary for Congress to issue to you the authority and guidance to (1) keep records and (2) to deny permits to individuals who have a history of destruction of Federal property, of violent activity, of non-peaceful protest? Do we need congressional remediation to address this gap in your ability to grant permits?

Mr. CUVELIER. If this Committee or Subcommittee were to take congressional action and seek our assistance for technical assistance, we would provide that. The 36 CFR 7.96 is largely structured based upon case law. And if there are other needs to review that or address that through congressional action, we would do so.

Dr. MILLER-MEEKS. And perhaps if the Chief of the Park Police were here today, we might have a real answer to that question.

Thank you so much for allowing me to waive on. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman from Iowa. The gentleman: rock, paper, scissors, from Wisconsin, is now recognized for his 5 minutes.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for waiving on this Committee.

Mr. Cuvelier, my first question for you is, do you have a pencil or a pen? OK. Write this down, please. It is <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organization/>.

So, you are telling me that you can't deny permits? Could you deny a permit for ISIS? Could you deny a permit from Al Shabab, from al Qaeda, from the Haqqani Network, from Hezbollah? Yes? Anybody.

Mr. CUVELIER. To my knowledge, we have never had an application for a permit for those organizations.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Wait, you just told me you couldn't deny it, even if you had one.

OK, so that is a list. It is really super-duper long. Yes, keep scrolling. Those are the lists of the designated terrorist organizations by the State Department, sir. And you have a bunch of people you are saying that you can't deny a permit.

So, you are telling me, a Member of Congress who has fought for this country my entire adult life, multiple combat tours, all that stuff, about 50 of my friends killed in training and combat since 9/11, tragically, that you would not deny a permit, or you are incapable of denying a permit for the groups that are responsible for killing tens of thousands of American citizens and hundreds of thousands of our allies around the world. Is that right?

Mr. CUVELIER. No, sir, that is not what I am saying. I am just careful about engaging in hypotheticals that haven't happened.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Don't check me out dude. A bunch of terrorist supporters didn't hypothetically tear down the American flag and



fly a Palestinian flag on your property. So, don't come here with that little trite thing about hypotheticals, pal. That happened. And me and some of my buddies went down there and flew those American flags again, and you did it. That is pathetic.

Are you familiar with the concept of predictive analytics? You are probably not. It is a branch of advanced analytics that makes predictions about future outcomes using historical data combined with statistical modeling, data mining techniques, and machine learning. OK. I am going to give this to you so that the next time someone applies for a permit on your property, you could use this concept to understand that you are probably going to have people that are destroying government property.

This is just absurd. We stand for something. You allegedly stand for something because your conduct and the conduct of your Department is displaying something that you say is inappropriate, right? Is it appropriate to destroy government property or not? Is it unlawful activity? Is it a First Amendment right to destroy government property, yes or no?

Mr. CUVELIER. As I stated before, we are working in our investigations to hold individuals accountable for the criminal acts which occurred.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. OK. You can tell that I am not a member of this Committee, because I was speaking into the wrong microphone.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CUVELIER. I can hear you. Yes, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I know you can hear me, pal. I don't need a microphone. And I didn't need one that night when we went down and said the Pledge of Allegiance after we re-flew those American flags.

So, here is what I want you to do. I want you to read that website. I want you to write down those lists of terrorist organizations that are acknowledged by our government. I want you to exercise predictive analytics in the future, because what you are doing is a disservice to the United States of America, and it disgraces that uniform you are wearing. And I wore one for 26 years myself. Is that clear, sir?

Mr. CUVELIER. I understand what you are sharing, sir. Thank you.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Wisconsin. The gentleman from Minnesota is acknowledged.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes, Mr. Chair, in my testimony I questioned Mr. Cuvelier about the IRA money, and there was a discrepancy.

I said \$19 million; you said \$29 million.

I want to enter into the record the Government Executive report that says it was actually \$19 million that the Park Service got to hire police officers, Park Service officers in New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. And I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

### **National Park Service's IRA hiring surge could fail ahead of funding deadline**

While the legislation gave hundreds of millions to NPS for hiring, it didn't grant new hiring flexibilities, which the Interior Department inspector general reports is hampering progress.

*Government Executive*, August 16, 2024 by Sean Michael Newhouse

<https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2024/08/national-park-services-ira-hiring-surge-could-fail-ahead-funding-deadline/398868/>

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There's a possibility that the National Park Service won't be able to spend the \$500 million it received as part of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act to bolster hiring before the funding expires in fiscal 2030.

"Given the challenges NPS faces with hiring and filling a large number of positions, there is a potential risk that NPS may not fully execute its hiring plans on time before funds expire," the Office of the Inspector General for the Interior Department wrote in a flash report published Thursday.

NPS is planning on using the IRA funding to hire 1,418 employees, including information technology specialists, maintenance workers and park rangers. Approximately half of the positions are term appointments, meaning the employment period is between one to four years.

However a NPS budget analyst told investigators that a lack of hiring flexibilities is slowing things down. The federal government sometimes uses such flexibilities to exempt certain processes and speed up recruitment. It's one method federal agencies have used since 2023 to bring on hundreds of AI experts. But without those flexibilities, NPS said it can take several months to a year to onboard new employees.

NPS also has previously expressed that a shortage of housing for prospective employees hinders recruitment.

The OIG reported that, as of May 31, NPS has spent about \$21 million of the money and has onboarded 447 employees.

"We appreciate the IG's review and affirmation that NPS has established effective and accountable business systems to track these funds provided by the Inflation Reduction Act, and that while NPS faces challenges in recruitment we are hiring as fast as possible within existing authorities," an NPS spokesperson said in a statement.

While the number of visitors to national parks has increased, the number of full-time employees has decreased. Between fiscal 2011 and 2022, NPS reported that the total number of its workers went down by approximately 15%.

Of the \$500 million provided to NPS in the IRA:

- \$29 million is for a director's priority fund to address emerging issues, such as staffing for new parks.
- \$19 million is to hire U.S. Park Police officers in New York City, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.
- \$11 million is to establish a Human Resources team to support IRA-enabled hiring.
- The remaining \$441 million is allocated among the parks, with more money going to larger parks like Yellowstone in Wyoming and Grand Canyon in Arizona.

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Dr. GOSAR. The gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Stansbury, is recognized for her 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to get this right from the very beginning.

Mr. Associate Director, can you please help us with the pronunciation of your name?

Mr. CUVELIER. So, if you remember the car, the Cavalier, I am a Cuvelier.

Ms. STANSBURY. Cuvelier? All right, we got it. OK, Mr. Cuvelier, first and foremost, let me just say thank you for your service to this country. Thank you as a member of law enforcement, thank you to the 3,000 Park Police who are law enforcement and dutifully show up every single day in their uniforms and serve this country. These are dangerous jobs. These are important jobs. And we do thank you for your service.

And I do want to apologize, as you have appeared in front of this Committee, for comments that have appeared to be disrespectful to you or to any of the law enforcement that serve our great nation. I know that my colleagues, especially those across the aisle who have also served as law enforcement, whether it was national or local, and in the military know how important your service is. But sometimes the political arena in which we operate can lead people to be disrespectful in their tone and their words, so I apologize for that.

I want to take a moment to talk a little bit more about the process of how national parks approach these applications, what happened on the actual day, and get clarification about the incident and its aftermath, and how the Park Service, alongside the lawyers for the Federal Government, is pursuing justice.

So, as the National Park Service received the application for this particular protest, was there anything to your knowledge that raised concerns about how the protests would proceed and that there might be some act of violence or desecration?

Mr. CUVELIER. Based upon the permit application that was filed, no, there was not.

As part of the pre-planning, again, we engaged with all our inter-agency partners to understand what they know, what they have as contemporaneous intelligence information. We also engaged the permit, in this case ANSWER Coalition, seeking clarification on what their intentions are, where, and again, as occurred in this case, the first choice of location was already taken, providing an alternative location. So, we do that as part of the planning cycle.

I think the IG pointed out very clearly our planning cycle is largely driven or compressed by when the application is received. Sometimes we have plenty of notice, sometimes we simply just have days.

Ms. STANSBURY. And there have been a number of protests not just this last year but over the last several years on our National Parks property. This is one of the challenges, of course, of being in our nation's capital and being a free nation where we allow free speech.

And I really appreciate the IG's report, which was released this week, which enumerates the various protests that happened on parks land this summer. And I want to note something very important on page 9 of the IG report, which is that there are at least five incidents that are noted here that caused significant damage to national parks or Federal property. And the incident that is being discussed here today, the IG found that the damage to the property was on the order of about \$11,000 to Federal property.

That is inexcusable, of course, and it sounds like we are going to get to the bottom of how that is being prosecuted.

But I want to point out here that the IG found that January 6, the attack on this Capitol, caused more than a quarter million dollars in damages just to parks property, and that doesn't even account for the damages that happened overall to this building. In fact, there was \$2.7 billion in estimated damages and seven deaths, according to Congress' own investigatory body, the GAO.

Certainly, we are a nation that protects free speech. But if we are going to talk about and apply policy and make sure that our agencies and our Federal law enforcement are able to respond to these incidents, we need to be honest about the conversation here and what we are trying to do.

In this particular incident, tell us what justice is being pursued and how those who have been found to be culpable, what that process will look like.

Mr. CUVELIER. Yes. Thank you for your question.

We used, again, our partners with the FBI to create a bulletin. The FBI has assisted us in identifying open source video and other kinds of imagery, the public's tips and leads have all led to the arrest of at least four individuals, as I shared earlier, the investigation regarding three others. They have been charged for damage to government property and assault on officers. Through that criminal process they will adjudicate either innocence or guilt. And as we work with DOJ, if there is an opportunity for restitution we will engage in that conversation, as well.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you very much. So, there is a justice process, so the comments this morning that have been made that there is no justice being pursued are just factually untrue.

And I think that IG report is very illuminating. These are challenges that actually, as members on this panel, we do need to address and make sure that there is consistent policy and consistent resourcing for our Federal agencies.

And I thank you for coming today and for your service.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman from New Mexico. The gentleman from New York is now recognized for his 5 minutes.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank Chairman Gosar for allowing me to be present here today. And Chairman Westerman, thank you for allowing me to be read in.

I want to add a different angle on the events of July 24, and have them entered into the record, because I think they are material. As the prime minister of Israel spoke and we were on the House Floor is, of course, when these tragic events and a stain on our Capitol were taking place. And as we participated in the event of hosting Prime Minister of Israel, we were unaware, Members of Congress, of what was unfolding just a few blocks away.

But when I returned to my congressional office and turned on the TV, I saw the shocking images of your officers being assaulted. I saw the shocking images of our flags, the three American flags, being hauled down and burned. Much has been said about First Amendment rights, and it is true you have a right to burn the American flag if it is your own flag. You don't have the right to tear down government property and burn it. That is vandalism, and that was a riot.

Like many other Americans, I was appalled by what I saw on the television that day, and immediately my mind went to work because this is just blocks away from the heart of our democracy. What is it that we can do to make this right?

I drove home that afternoon after the prime minister's speech to have a short dinner with my wife in our little apartment. And as I left there, I told her, "Honey, I am going to make this right," that, "We are going to restore those flags." It is a short distance from our apartment. We had a late night series of votes that evening, and I purposefully drove by Union Station to see if the Palestinian flags had been removed, to see if the American flags had been restored, and the American flags had not.

I am a nuclear submarine officer, a nuclear submarine veteran, so we tend to be very meticulous. I looked up pictures to make sure that the flags flew 24/7, and in fact, they did. They are illuminated, and they are meant to be there on all three flagpoles, flying. But the flagpoles were bare that night, right about 8:30 at night. We were called back for a late night series of votes.

I had about 45 minutes on the floor of the House of Representatives to recruit fellow Members of Congress to come with me to restore those flags. I am very honored to be joined by Congressman Mike Collins, who was one of the eight who joined me that evening. I am not going to lie to you. I was looking for veterans and red-necks. I am not going to tell you which one Representative Collins represents.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WILLIAMS. But I will say that I assembled about eight other Members of Congress to come with me. Four of them were Navy SEALs. I can pretty confidently say this is the only time that a submariner has led Navy SEALs into combat, something I love mentioning to them at every opportunity.

And just as I was walking off the House Floor, I ran into Speaker Johnson and I said, "Mr. Speaker, here is a picture of the flagpoles that are bare right at the heart of our democracy. Would you join us in making this right?"

I called one of my staff members, asked him to find three flags. Congressman Morgan Luttrell had done the same. So, we arrived there with six flags, eight Members of Congress, and we actually ran in, sir, to your colleagues and to the Metropolitan Police. We didn't know how we would be greeted. And I want to tell you, your staff and your officers were so welcoming and so excited that the leaders of the country had come to make this right.

We raised those three flags, the three American flags that night. It wasn't in front of 20 camera crews, there were no other staff members other than one on my staff, just the eight of us that had walked over to make this happen. And with the assistance of Metropolitan Police and the Park Police, so thank you.

After that, Congressman Van Orden, who I understand was just here, another member of this party, said, "Brandon, you led us here. Why don't you lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance?" And we lined up and we recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Even as a Navy veteran, it has never meant more to me than it meant on that night of July 24.

What is important, I think, about this event is that standing up to all forms of riot, not just because of whatever political persuasion they are, but standing up to all of it is significant and meaningful, and there are many who failed to speak out against this riot. But there were eight of us that went and made it right. And I will tell you why that is important, and I will close with this comment.

In every community in America, we are looking for leaders to stand up and make things right, including the gentleman, the Marine, on the New York City subway, Mr. Penny, who has just been acquitted of a crime for which he never should have been tried because he stood up to make things right. And as you see other people in your community making things right, it gives others courage. And if you see the leaders of this nation stand up and make things right, it will give others courage to do the same.

So, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to enter the aftermath of this into the record, and I am proud to be joined by other members of this Committee that stood with me that day. And I yield back, sir. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR. I will now go to me. I will be the last one. I am always about trying to reform something. One of the things I want to ask you, Mr. Greenblatt, would it be helpful if you had any non-government agency that actually takes any penny from the Federal Government, that they would have to disclose where all their money comes from? Would that help?

Mr. GREENBLATT. If they would have to put up, I didn't—

Dr. GOSAR. Well, yes, I just want to know if they took Federal money, one penny of it, if it was direct or through indirectly through a pass-through, they would actually have to acknowledge where they got all their money from. Would that help for transparency?

Mr. GREENBLATT. That could.

Dr. GOSAR. OK.

Mr. GREENBLATT. You know, I haven't done the analysis on that, but theoretically that could.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. In Article I, section 9, it basically says that Congress has the duty to oversee Federal judges and prosecutors. In your opinion, would it be great to actually be able to call them in and say, "What did you do for the First Amendment? What did you do for the Second Amendment? Third Amendment?" There has to be some accountability. There are checks and balances based throughout our whole republic. Would that help?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Theoretically, sure, yes.

Dr. GOSAR. Now, let me ask you another question. Do you know of a marriage venue that doesn't charge for a deposit on a venue?

Mr. GREENBLATT. No. I would love to know which ones don't.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes, I would like to find that.

Mr. GREENBLATT. But yes, I think they all do.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, wouldn't it be interesting that, if you had this bond, and I know the gentleman has already talked about a bond or a levy, that you actually had to put personal names down. And maybe you have to. But isn't there a way to hold those individuals accountable, based upon that bond? Because you are forced to prove that you didn't leave it in disarray, and it gives personal

accountability to whose name is on the list, regardless of who it is, right?

Mr. GREENBLATT. Sure. I think the issue here is the barrier to entry, the barrier to obtaining a permit, given the First Amendment protections, which are so strong, particularly in these spaces, that it makes having that bond or insurance a difficult proposition.

Is there a possibility of threading that needle between the massive First Amendment protections out there and the NPS's requirements to protect our national and cultural heritage? That is a possibility.

I think Mr. Cuvelier referred to engaging with DOJ and engaging with the Solicitor's Office in the Department to see whether there is a way to thread that needle. But that is a difficult prospect.

I think it works in theory, that that is what you would do in a marriage venue, say. And they do that, by the way, in weddings on National Park property. But with the First Amendment, I think the thumb is on the scale to approve permits with no barriers, as opposed to something like a bond or insurance. That is the difficulty, I think, that the Park Service is facing.

Dr. GOSAR. So, transparency would also lead us to believe that, if you had a problem child, let's say, you put him in time out.

Even though the prospects of the First Amendment is so powerful, if you don't pay up you are violating your tenets of any agreement. So, any person that has a bond, like say a jail for a jail aspect, they could say First Amendment, and they could get by and get a change of venue.

But I think there is a way to do this in a way that says, listen, you violated this, your name is on the thing, you lose this bond. And until you pay that, and I think you ought to require it beforehand instead of aftermath, that you can make those changes accordingly and say, listen, I would love to give you First Amendment, but you haven't paid this up.

Mr. GREENBLATT. I think the other issue that they are facing is the bifurcation between holding the permit holder responsible and the individuals who caused the damage responsible, and I think the question is whether there is the ability to tie the damage to the entity, as opposed to the individuals. And I think that is the difficulty that the Park Service is facing, is do you hold the permit holder responsible even, say, if it is not their personnel, if you will, or not at their instruction.

Dr. GOSAR. I got you, but Mr. Van Orden also talked to you about, you have a list of these bad actors.

Mr. GREENBLATT. Sure.

Dr. GOSAR. And it would be a simple test. Are you a part of these bad actors? Do you have an X behind your name? You filed for this bond, and you didn't do anything, and you have a problem there. I think there is a way to thread that, don't you think?

Mr. GREENBLATT. I am happy to engage in the discussion and help, but I don't know. I am going to be very frank with you. I don't know. That is something for the Solicitor, for the Department of Justice, and for the National Park Service to figure out in concert with the decision makers here on the Hill.

It is a hard line to walk. This is what I said in my opening statement. I don't know that there is an easy answer there because of those First Amendment protections. I am not saying no, and I am happy to engage in the dialog. I just think it is very difficult, given the sheer strength of those First Amendment, you know, it would have to survive strict scrutiny in court, and that is the key question.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes, OK. That is why I alluded to the Federal judges and prosecutors for evaluation.

OK, well, I think that solves our first panel. We are going to take a short break and our second panel will be seated. Thank you very much, gentleman. Thank you, I appreciate it.

[Recess.]

Dr. GOSAR. Welcome back, everybody. I will now introduce the next panel.

Mr. Kenneth Spencer, Chairman, United States Park Police, Fraternal Order of Police, Washington, DC; Mr. Alex Goldenberg, Director of Intelligence, Network Contagion Research Institute, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina; and Mr. Scott Walter, President, Capital Research Center, Washington, DC.

Let me remind you how our system works. Most of you understand there is a 5-minute limit when you are testifying. For the first 4 minutes this is green, then we will go to the yellow. It tells you to kind of start wrapping it up. And if you see the red, really make it short and cut off, because we want to get to all the questions.

Make sure that your microphone is on and that you have the right one on for you. And it is pretty easy for you down there. Up here it is a little bit of a mess.

I will introduce Mr. Spencer for your 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF KENNETH SPENCER, CHAIRMAN, UNITED STATES PARK POLICE, FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. SPENCER. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. My name is Kenneth Spencer. My testimony this morning is delivered in my capacity as the Chairman of the United States Park Police, Fraternal Order of Police.

Our organization represents the interests of approximately 350 sworn law enforcement officers in the United States Park Police. I am honored to be here today and very thankful for this opportunity to share officer views on and lessons learned from the dangerous and destructive protests in and around Columbus Circle on July 24, 2024.

On average, U.S. Park Police officers protect 160,000 daily visitors to our parks, patrol a geographic area of 30,000 acres over three urban metropolitan regions and more than 75 miles of highway. Notably, we are, or at least once were, the world's leading law enforcement agency when it comes to supporting large-scale special events and other First Amendment activities.

Importantly, our agency's mission includes icon protection. Our officers proudly protect the Statue of Liberty, the Presidio in San Francisco, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the



Jefferson Memorial, and many others, including the Christopher Columbus Memorial Fountain in Columbus Circle. We also patrol many Federal highways, including the busy commuter routes leading into and out of Washington, DC from Maryland and Virginia.

As members of this Subcommittee are aware, the ANSWER Coalition protests intentionally overlapped the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. On July 24, the United States Secret Service requested the U.S. Park Police to provide tactical and civil disturbance assets in Glover-Archbold Park while Prime Minister Netanyahu attended Senator Lieberman's memorial service at an adjacent location.

Moreover, the U.S. Park Police provided site security in and around the Watergate Hotel and provided motorcade escort security for multiple dignitary movements throughout the visit. We were also responsible for providing multiple road and traffic closures throughout the Washington Metropolitan Area. At the same time, our officers were charged with assigned events at Wolf Trap for a concert, four construction details, and a security detail at the Frederick Douglass home. And, of course, we were expected to perform our ordinary daily patrol responsibilities which include law enforcement and community safety throughout the District of Columbia, as well as highway patrols of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and many others.

We had 166 sworn officers available for the special detail on July 24, including everyone assigned to work on their day off. Some have questioned why only 29 officers were assigned to Columbus Circle that day. In reality, it is amazing that even those resources were available to us, given the aforementioned demands of that day.

One of the main reasons I am excited to testify this morning is to share to you about how proud our union is of the officers who did everything they could to protect and serve in the face of an extremely dangerous and overwhelming situation. This was not a peaceful protest. Indeed, significant subset of protesters were determined to commit brazen acts of violence and costly destruction of property. To say it plainly, our officers did a remarkable and exemplary job that afternoon with the limited resources supplied to us by DOI, NPS, and Congress.

Unfortunately, our government's irresponsible neglect of the agency has led to staffing shortages that were unthinkable just a decade ago. In the last 12 months alone, our agency has lost 37 sworn officers, many of whom left for other agencies that don't face the budget cuts that the DOI and NPS regularly impose upon our officers. It is disheartening that the government has allowed our once revered department to decay to the point where we are more than 150 officers short of the minimum required to accomplish our mission.

Even the DOI's own Inspector General concluded earlier this month that "The USPP pay scale is set up by statute, and is among the least advantageous of the Federal uniformed police agencies." It is no overstatement to suggest that the safety of Americans in Washington, New York, and San Francisco, as well as the millions

of visitors to our urban national landmarks are at serious risk because of our agency staffing shortage.

Importantly, Congress can and must do something about it. A bipartisan group of representatives led by Representative Nicole Malliotakis introduced H.R. 9928, the U.S. Park Police Modernization Act, legislation that balances the recruitment and retention resources among other Federal law enforcement organizations.

In particular, our officers want to thank Chairman Westerman, Representative Malliotakis, Representative Gottheimer, and Senator Barrasso for their extraordinary leadership on this issue.

Notably, the Modernization Act is strongly supported by the National Fraternal Order of Police and the U.S. Capitol Police Labor Committee. The incoming administration has indicated a desire to improve the quality of life for law enforcement officers. We hope that is true and, if so, they can get off on the right foot by directing the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to incorporate the modest resources needed for H.R. 9928 in their budget request for Fiscal Year 2026.

If Congress and the new administration fail to act, I honestly don't know if our agency can survive as a viable urban law enforcement organization with any reasonable expectation to protect safety and security during First Amendment events like the one that occurred on July 24. To ignore this reality would be tragic and shameful.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the members of the U.S. Park Police, Fraternal Order of Police, and I welcome any questions you may have. Thanks.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Spencer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KENNETH SPENCER, CHAIRMAN, UNITED STATES PARK  
POLICE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

Good morning Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, my name is Kenneth Spencer and my testimony this afternoon is delivered in my capacity as the Chairman of the United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police ("USPPFOP"). Simply put, our organization represents the interests of the approximately 350 sworn law enforcement officers of the United States Park Police ("USPP"). I am honored to be here today and very thankful for this opportunity to share the USPPFOP's views on, and lessons learned from, the dangerous and destructive protests in and around Columbus Circle on July 24, 2024.

By way of background, in addition to my capacity as the Chairman of the USPPFOP, I serve as a Master Patrol Officer for the USPP. In my nearly 15 years with the agency, with the help from my brothers and sisters at the USPP and in other law enforcement departments, I have survived first-hand experiences with several serious and large-scale incidents where crowd control was difficult and public safety was in jeopardy. Events like the one in July are predictable and, in years long gone by, the US Park Police was rightfully viewed as the world's foremost law enforcement organization that protected First Amendment rights of the protesters while, at the same time, ensured the safety of the community and protected national landmarks that adorn much of the federal land under our jurisdiction. Sadly, due to decades of neglect by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior and the United States Congress, our Agency's ability to effectively manage such events is significantly diminished, leading to disappointing and dangerous outcomes and the Answer Coalition event represents just the tip of the iceberg for future dangerous events given the state of our political climate.

Before my time with the USPP, I proudly served in the United States Air Force as a Law Enforcement Area Supervisor and Nuclear Weapons Security Escort Team Leader with the United States Air Force Security Forces. During these years, I was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, completing

missions in multiple locations throughout Iraq and Kuwait. I firmly believe my background and experience with such “powder keg” environments involving large populations is directly relevant to the discussion here today.

#### **United States Park Police**

The United States Park Police was created by President George Washington in 1791. The Force functions as a unit of the National Park Service (“NPS”) with jurisdiction in urban federal parks, including federal lands throughout the District of Columbia and the Washington Metropolitan Area, San Francisco, and New York City. In Washington, DC, we share the same duties, responsibilities, and arrest authority as our brothers and sisters in the DC Metropolitan Police Department. Our mission is to provide quality law enforcement to safeguard lives, protect our national treasures and symbols of democracy, and preserve the natural and cultural resources entrusted to us.

On average, USPP officers protect 160,000 daily visitors to our parks, patrol a geographic area of over 30,000 acres across 3 urban metropolitan regions, and more than 75 miles of highway. Notably, we are, or at least once were, the world’s leading law enforcement agency when it comes to supporting large scale special events and other First Amendment activities.

Importantly, our agency’s mission includes icon protection. Our officers proudly protect the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial and many others, including the statue of Justice John Marshall in John Marshall Park and the Christopher Columbus Memorial Fountain in Columbus Circle.

#### **United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police**

The United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police, for the last 30 years, serves as the exclusive representative for bargaining unit employees of the USPP. We negotiate collective bargaining agreements as necessary and administer the labor-management agreement between the officers and the National Park Service. On a day-to-day basis, the USPPFOP communicates the challenges facing USPP officers to our senior management leadership, the public and their elected representatives with the goal of improving the operational readiness of the Force. Membership in the USPPFOP is voluntary and we represent all members of the bargaining unit regardless of membership status. We do not have a political action committee, we do not make political donations, and we do not endorse candidates for public office.

Most recently, the USPPFOP has focused on issues related to officer retention and recruitment as the consequences from decades of NPS neglect (across administrations from both political parties) has come to roost. The National Park Service has suggested that the minimum number of officers needed to accomplish our essential missions is at least 650. One pre-September 11th study by Booz Allen suggested the US Park Police needs at least 820 officers to safely operate. As of today, we have a total of 507 sworn officers across all three jurisdictions—a smaller force than we had in 1975. It is not an overstatement to suggest that, at current staffing levels, our agency is unsustainable.

Let me be perfectly clear—on any given day we are at least 150 officers short of our required minimum levels. Our capacity to serve and protect the public today is literally bursting at the seams. Some in Congress and in the media have questioned why more arrests were not made on July 24th. That is the wrong question to ask. Instead, they should be asking how it is possible that DOI and NPS have ignored the US Park Police staffing crisis which, in turn, has predictably led to out-of-control protests that endanger the public, the protesters, and the officers themselves.

Fortunately, a bipartisan group in Congress, led by Representative Nicole Malliotakis, introduced H.R. 9928, the United States Park Police Modernization Act, legislation that balances the recruitment and retention resources among similarly situated federal law enforcement organizations.

#### **“Stop the Genocide in Gaza” Permitting Process**

US Park Police officers have a limited role in the permitting planning process and absolutely no role in the deliberations or decision on whether to issue the permit. It is my understanding that the Answer Coalition submitted its application on June 18, but the National Park Service’s consideration of the application was delayed until July.

The US Park Police Special Events Unit was invited to participate in three planning meetings with the NPS permitting office on July 10th, July 18th, and July 22nd. The NPS issued the permit on July 23rd, which was valid from 5 am to 4

pm on July 24th. The permit was based on 5,000 anticipated participants. The specific locations set aside under the permit included John Marshall Park and the Pennsylvania Avenue sidewalks between 3rd and 5th Street, NW.

It is worth noting that the US Park Police were familiar with the Answer Coalition and their previous tactics. Based on our experience with the Coalition, we expected civil disturbance and vandalism.

The United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police takes no position on whether the NPS rightfully issued the permit but recognize and cherish the fundamental constitutional rights that groups, even those with abhorrent and extremist views, have to protest peacefully on federal land.

#### **US Park Police Operations on July 24th, 2024**

As Members of this Subcommittee are aware, the protest intentionally overlapped the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Whenever high-profile foreign dignitaries or leaders are in Washington, our agency typically cancels all scheduled days off, assigns every available sworn officer, and provides Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) and Criminal Apprehension Teams (CAT). All of this was done, following protocol, in the lead-up to the “Stop the Genocide in Gaza” protest.

As an aside, I want to commend our Chief, Jessica Taylor, who has done an amazing job since taking the position less than 2 years ago. Like our union, Chief Taylor works tirelessly to repair the impact that our officer staffing shortage has on events like the one on July 24th. She and her Executive Command Staff work hard to advocate for the improvement of working conditions and officer safety; unfortunately, it often falls on deaf ears with NPS and DOI. Our officers genuinely appreciate her leadership and thank her for doing all she can to restore our agency to a position of full mission readiness.

On July 24th, the United States Secret Service requested the US Park Police to provide tactical and civil disturbance assets in Glover-Archbold Park while Prime Minister Netanyahu attended Senator Lieberman’s memorial service at an adjacent location. Moreover, the US Park Police provided site security in and around the Watergate Hotel and provided motorcade escort security for multiple dignitary movements throughout the visit. We were also responsible for providing multiple road and traffic closures throughout the Washington metropolitan area to close the motorcade routes that occurred on or near National Park Service jurisdiction. At the same time, our officers were charged with assigned events at Wolf Trap for a concert, four construction details, and a security detail at the Frederick Douglas home.

And, of course, we were expected to perform our ordinary daily patrol responsibilities which include law enforcement and community safety throughout the District of Columbia, as well as highway patrols of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and many others.

We had 166 sworn officers available for the special detail on July 24th. Some have questioned why “only” 29 officers were assigned to Columbus Circle that day. Frankly, it’s amazing that even those resources were available to us given the aforementioned demands of that day. Some have suggested that our agency could have requested additional resources from other field offices or agencies, but doing so would have been to throw good money after bad. It made no sense (and would have been recklessly dangerous) to put officers with no training in civil disturbances on the front line. Moreover, all expenses related to gear, per diems, travel and lodging would have been the responsibility of our agency which, due to the DOI’s and NPS’s neglect and indifference regarding seeking reasonable congressional appropriations, is just not feasible.

One might say we are at capacity, stretched too thin, or running on fumes. But those catchy phrases fail to capture the gravity of the situation in terms of safety and security. Any thoughtful observer of the US Park Police staffing crisis will tell you that, unless Congress acts immediately, catastrophe is predictable.

#### **Law Enforcement Outcomes from July 24th, 2024**

One of the main reasons I am excited to testify this afternoon is to share with you how proud our union is of the officers who did everything they could to protect and serve in the face of an extremely dangerous and overwhelming situation.

I am aware of complaints made by some, including by those who drape themselves in hollow “back the blue” rhetoric, suggesting that not enough arrests were made or that our officers somehow gave the protestors a “pass.” With only 29 officers available at the scene when chaos erupted, there was absolutely zero capability to safely carry out anything close to a mass arrest enforcement operation.

To say it plainly: Our officers did a remarkable and exemplary job that afternoon with the limited resources supplied to us by DOI, NPS and Congress.

If Congress is hoping to identify strategies to improve federal law enforcement response to dangerous civil disturbance and destruction of government property, it needs force the hand of the Department of Interior and the National Park Service to do a much better job at recruiting and retaining good officers. That begins with the passage of the U.S. Park Police Modernization Act.

### **Conclusion**

Officers of the United States Park Police are truly passionate about serving the public within the communities under our three jurisdictions. We are humbled by our responsibility to protect the millions of park visitors, as well as the surrounding residents and businesses. But we are equally proud of the legacy we leave behind—protecting our parks, highways, and national monuments so that future generations can enjoy them safely and without impairment.

Unfortunately, our government's irresponsible neglect of the agency has led to staffing shortages that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago. Frankly, it is astounding that the government has allowed our once-revered department to decay to the point where we are more than 150 officers short of the minimum required.

It is no overstatement to suggest that the safety of Americans in Washington, New York, and San Francisco, as well as the millions of visitors to our urban national landmarks, are at serious risk because of our agency's staffing shortage.

Importantly, Congress can do something about it—pass the US Park Police Modernization Act immediately. To be sure, Chairman Westerman along with Senator Barrasso have been amazing allies for our officers, and Representatives Malliotakis and Gottheimer have championed the bill, with invaluable support from the National Fraternal Order of Police and the US Capitol Police Labor Committee, throughout this Congress. So, my officers are reasonably wondering why hasn't anything been done? How can the Department of Interior and the National Park Service continue to thumb their nose at us in the face of such formidable demand for reform.

It is noteworthy that the incoming Administration has indicated a desire to improve the quality of life for law enforcement officers. We hope that is true and, if so, they can get off on the right foot by directing the Department of Interior and the National Park Service to incorporate the modest resources needed for H.R. 9928 in their budget request for FY 2026.

If Congress fails to act, I honestly do not know if our agency can survive as a viable urban law enforcement organization with any reasonable expectation to protect safety and security during First Amendment events like the one on July 24th. To ignore this reality would be tragic and shameful.

My position on this matter is not one of politics or public policy regarding the unrest in the Middle East. In fact, my testimony is based solely on law enforcement concerns that are all-too-real, dangerous, and tragically avoidable. Regrettably, I fear for the safety of our officers, the public, and the protestors themselves.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the members of the United States Park Police Fraternal Order of Police. I welcome any questions you have.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO KENNETH H. SPENCER, CHAIRMAN,  
UNITED STATES PARK POLICE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

### **Questions Submitted by Representative D'Esposito**

*Question 1. Mr. Spencer, does the Park Police keep any record of groups or organizations that have gotten violent on Public Lands? And, does the National Park Service seek that information when dealing with these organizations?*

Answer. The U.S. Park Police (USPP) maintains an Intelligence and Counterterrorism Unit dedicated to monitoring various groups and gathering intelligence to assess and address potential civil unrest or violence. The USPP collaborates closely with the FBI, with personnel assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) to enhance monitoring and response capabilities. Additionally, the USPP works in partnership with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to share information and ensure coordinated preparations for special events within or near its jurisdiction, whether those events are officially permitted or not. However, our efforts are significantly hindered by staffing challenges. Despite robust intelligence gathering and thorough preparation, the ongoing staffing crisis makes it

increasingly difficult to effectively manage and mitigate volatile situations that arise within our jurisdiction.

*Question 2. Before July 24, could you describe the experience of the Park Police when interacting with the ANSWER Coalition?*

Answer. The ANSWER Coalition has a well-documented history of engaging in activities that contribute to civil unrest, property damage, assaults on law enforcement and civilians, and other unlawful behavior. They also frequently disregard the terms and conditions of the permits issued to them by the National Park Service.

*Question 3. In your opinion, how can the National Park Service develop a more collaborative approach with the Park Police for permitting, planning, and secure public gatherings in order to better prevent events like those on July 24?*

Answer. The Labor-Management Contract with our Union explicitly states:

“The Union shall be given the opportunity to be represented at any formal discussion between one or more representatives of the Employer and one or more members of the Unit or their representatives concerning any grievance or personnel policy or other general conditions of employment. Representatives of the Employer involved in such meetings shall notify the Union prior to the start of such meetings and as soon as practical after the time, date, and place of such meeting is known. The Union representative shall be recognized to offer the Union’s view, if any, on the matter being discussed at an appropriate time prior to the conclusion of the meeting.”

Despite this clear obligation, the National Park Service has consistently failed to uphold this requirement, refusing to allow the USPPFOP to attend meetings regarding special events. This failure is deeply troubling, especially given that our members willingly put themselves in harm’s way to safeguard First Amendment rights at every event held on public lands in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and New York City. It is imperative that both our Union and the United States Park Police are given a rightful place at the table to ensure our voices are heard and our members are adequately represented in these critical discussions.

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Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Spencer. I now recognize Mr. Goldenberg for his 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF ALEX GOLDENBERG, DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE, NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE, MOUNT PLEASANT, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Thank you. Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and the distinguished members of the Committee, here in the United States, the land of free speech, a well-funded network with ties to extremist groups is exploiting the freedoms that protect legitimate protest in order to advance dangerous ideologies. Their activities may well defy the legal guardrails Congress has established to assure transparency in our public square, to limit the political advocacy of certain non-profits, and to prohibit the provision of material support for foreign terrorist organizations.

I am not an attorney. I am, however, an experienced open source intelligence analyst. The organization of which I am a part of, the Network Contagion Research Institute, studies cyber social threats and we have produced research on extremism from across the political spectrum, state-backed influence operations, child safety issues online, and more. I am here today to share what our research has disclosed about the violent July demonstration at Union Station, which resulted in vandalism and at least one assault and other attempts to paralyze public bridges, train stations, airports, and other critical infrastructure.

Although these demonstrations were meant to appear as spontaneous expressions of outrage, they were anything but. They were the product of a well-funded network operating on the outer edge of the law, if not beyond them. A network of organizations, many of which operate with non-profit, tax-exempt status, or are fiscally sponsored by groups with tax-exempt status work to drown out calls for genuine peace and resolution, including the Two State Solution that so many in the international community advocate for. They openly celebrate and support designated terrorist organizations, advocate for the engagement of illegal activities including the promotion of civil disobedience, and organizing protests that intentionally break the law.

If 501(c)(3)'s are found to be encouraging unlawful action, it could lose its tax exempt status.

On October 7, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel that involved coordinated rocket strikes, rapes, mass shootings, including the slaughter of families in their beds. On that same day, BreakThrough News, an outlet with close ties to the ANSWER Coalition, a key organizer for the demonstration we are discussing today, celebrated the atrocities perpetrated that day, framed them as "resistance," and included an interview with a member of the PFLP, a designated terrorist organization that is reported to have been complicit in holding hostages in Gaza.

In July, a protest at Union Station that we are organized here to speak about was organized by the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, with Brian Becker of the ANSWER Coalition listed as person in charge. Who is Brian Becker, the person in charge of this demonstration? He is the central organizer for the Party of Socialism and Liberation, an instructor at the People's Forum, and the National Coordinator for the ANSWER Coalition.

It is important to note that the People's Forum shares an office with BreakThrough News, which is run by his relative. The ANSWER Coalition has repeatedly given voice to extremist groups, including the PFLP. Just months after the October 7 attack, Brian Becker, the individual listed on the permit of the July 24 protest, hosted a member of the PFLP on his YouTube channel, reinforcing their pattern of support for violent agendas. Videos on their online platform feature other members of designated terrorist organizations. Many of these videos are even listed as fundraisers for BreakThrough News.

What we are seeing is not grassroots activism. The People's Forum, one of the main organizers that participated in the July demonstrations, has received over \$20 million from Neville Roy Singham, a U.S.-born millionaire currently living in Shanghai who, according to a *New York Times* investigation, has been central to a global network promoting and amplifying CCP talking points worldwide. Before October 7, this global network focused on amplifying anti-American and pro-CCP content, including denying CCP repression of Uyghur Muslims. After October 7, this network shifted to amplify radical anti-Israel narratives and help promote demonstrations like the ones that we have seen on Union Station.

On October 7, the People's Forum called on followers to join the All Out for Palestine rally in front of the Israeli consulate in New York City the next day. At that October 8 rally, as Israel was still

counting the dead and the United States was determining how many Americans were killed or kidnapped, Eugene Puryear, a host at BreakThrough News, reported that there was “some sort of rave or desert party where they were having a great time until the resistance came in in electrified hang gliders and killed at least two dozen hipsters.” Three hundred and sixty-four people were murdered and many more were raped, injured, and tortured at that music festival.

At the same demonstration, the Education Director for the People’s Forum said approvingly after October 7, “Yesterday the world woke up to incredible news.”

The actions we are witnessing are not simply free speech, they are part of a larger web of extremist activism with connections to terrorism and foreign governments. I encourage Congress to investigate these organizations, trace their funding sources, and hold them accountable for any and all illegal activities in which they are engaged. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Goldenberg follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ALEX GOLDENBERG, SENIOR ADVISOR, THE NETWORK  
CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee,  
Here in the United States—the land of free speech—a well-funded network with ties to extremist groups is exploiting the freedoms that protect legitimate protest in order to advance dangerous ideologies. Their activities may well defy the legal guardrails Congress has established to assure transparency in our public square, to limit the political advocacy of certain nonprofits, and to prohibit the provision of material support to foreign terrorist organizations.

I am not an attorney; I am, however, an experienced open source intelligence analyst. The organization of which I am a part of, The Network Contagion Research Institute, studies cyber-social threats and we have produced research on extremism across the political spectrum, state-backed influence operations, child safety issues online, and more. I am here today to share what my research has disclosed about the violent July demonstration at Union Station, which resulted in vandalism and at least one assault, and other attempts to paralyze public bridges, train stations, airports, and other critical infrastructure. Although these demonstrations were meant to appear as spontaneous expressions of outrage, they were anything but. They were the product of a well-funded network operating on the outer edge of our laws if not beyond them.

A network of U.S. organizations, many of which either operate with non-profit tax-exempt status or are fiscally sponsored by groups that promote extremist ideologies and work to drown out genuine calls for peace and resolution, including for the two-state solution that so many in the international community advocate. They openly celebrate and support designated terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (or PFLP) all of which played a direct role in the October 7th attacks. They also advocate for the engagement of illegal activities, including the promotion of civil disobedience and organizing protests that intentionally break the law. If 501(c)(3)’s are found to be encouraging unlawful action, it could lose its tax-exempt status.

On October 7th, 2023, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel that involved coordinated rocket strikes, rapes, mass shootings including the slaughter of families in their beds, and kidnappings. On that day, terrorists murdered roughly 1,200 people and took more than 250 people hostage.

On that same day, Breakthrough News, an outlet with close ties to the ANSWER Coalition, a key organizer for the demonstration we are discussing today, celebrated the atrocities perpetrated that day, framed them as “resistance,” and included an interview with a standing member of the PFLP’s politburo. As you may know, the PFLP is reported to have been complicit in holding hostages in Gaza.

In July, a protest at Union Station in Washington, DC, was organized by the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, with Brian Becker of the ANSWER Coalition listed as the “Person in Charge.” While burning American and Israeli flags is protected



speech, as is displaying the flags of terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the PFLP near our nation's capital, during this demonstration a police officer was assaulted and a public monument was vandalized.

Who is Brian Becker, the person in charge of the demonstration? He is a central organizer for the Party for Socialism and Liberation, an instructor for the People's Forum, and the National Coordinator for the ANSWER Coalition. The People's Forum shares office space with Breakthrough News, which is run by his relative.

The ANSWER Coalition has repeatedly given voice to extremist groups, including the PFLP. Just months after the October 7th attack, Brian Becker hosted a PFLP leader, reinforcing the pattern of support for violent agendas. Videos on their online platform feature other members of designated terrorist organizations. Many of these videos are listed as fundraisers for BreakThrough News.

What we are seeing is not grassroots activism. The People's Forum, one of the organizations that participated in the July demonstrations, has received over \$20 million from Neville Roy Singham, a U.S.-born millionaire living in Shanghai who, according to a New York Times investigation, has been central to a global network promoting CCP talking points.

Before October 7, this global network focused on amplifying anti-American and pro-CCP content, including denying the CCP repression of Uyghur Muslims. After October 7, this network shifted to amplifying radical anti-Israel narratives and helped promote demonstrations like the one at Union Station.

On October 7th, the People's Forum called on followers to join the "All Out for Palestine" rally in front of the Israeli Consulate in New York City the next day. At that October 8th rally, as Israel was still counting the dead and the U.S. was determining how many Americans were killed or kidnapped, Eugene Puryear, a host on Breakthrough News, reported that "there was some sort of rave or desert party where they were having a great time until the resistance came in electrified hang-gliders and took at least several dozen hipsters." (Three hundred sixty-four people were murdered and many more were raped, injured, or tortured.)

At the same demonstration, Layan Fuleihan, the Education Director of the People's Forum, said approvingly that, "yesterday the world woke up to incredible news." That demonstration on October 8, was an explicit celebration of the murder and kidnapping of innocent civilians.

The Shut It Down for Palestine coalition, the umbrella group behind the Union Station demonstration, has not limited itself to disruptions in Washington, DC. They have orchestrated disruptions to critical infrastructure in New York City, blocked roads to airports like JFK and LAX and caused bridge and tunnel closures. These illegal actions have created not only financial burdens for cities but also significant public safety risks.

One key group within the Shut It Down for Palestine coalition is Al-Awda, an organization with direct ties to designated terrorist organizations. Al-Awda's communications officer, Charlotte Kates, was recently seen in Tehran receiving an award alongside members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Her husband, Khaled Barakat, is allegedly a senior member of the PFLP, and along with Kates, run a sham charity that serves as an international fundraiser for the PFLP according to the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

In July, Senators Rubio and Graham called on the Department of Justice to investigate 18 organizations tied to Neville Roy Singham for potential violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. These include the People's Forum, ANSWER Coalition, Al-Awda, Samidoun, and Breakthrough News—all of which played a role in the Union Station demonstration. At least three of these organizations flagged by Senators Rubio and Graham—the People's Forum, ANSWER, and the Palestinian Youth Movement—have already begun mobilizing to disrupt Inauguration Day on January 20th, 2025.

The actions we are witnessing are not simply free speech. They are part of a larger web of extremist activism with connections to terrorism. I encourage Congress to investigate these organizations, trace their funding sources, and hold them accountable for any and all illegal activities in which they are engaged.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO ALEX GOLDENBERG, DIRECTOR OF  
INTELLIGENCE, NETWORK CONTAGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

**Questions Submitted by Representative D'Esposito**

*Question 1. Mr. Goldenberg, could you explain how organizations, such as Breakthrough News and The People's Forum, by hosting or amplifying content that glorifies acts of terror, might face scrutiny under the material support statute?*

*Question 2. In your view, should organizations that promote extremist content, even if they are not directly involved in violence, be subject to scrutiny for potentially aiding foreign terrorist organizations?*

*Question 3. Without delving into legal specifics, could you broadly discuss the potential consequences for organizations that facilitate the promotion of extremist ideologies or narratives, given the legal precedents around material support?*

Answer. Congressman D'Esposito, to answer all three questions,

As we've seen in the case of Tarek Mehanna, a U.S. citizen convicted of providing material support to al-Qaeda by translating and distributing jihadi propaganda, the act of promoting terrorist content—even indirectly—can have significant legal consequences. Mehanna's conviction stemmed from his role in translating and disseminating videos and articles aimed at recruiting fighters for terrorist groups.<sup>1</sup>

This is directly relevant to the actions of platforms like Breakthrough News and the People's Forum, which have hosted interviews with members of terrorist organizations and have glorified acts of terror. For example, a host on Breakthrough News recently celebrated the October 7th attacks as a "prison break."

Breakthrough continuously hosts members of the PFLP on their platforms and has hosted Hezbollah leadership in the past. Some of these events were even monetized on YouTube, showing a direct fiscal benefit to BT. People's Forum, hosted the People's Conference held in a hall named after a PFLP terrorist, Walid Daqqah, and hosted a speaker that is a member of the PFLP on a livestream.

The material support statute is clear in criminalizing the provision of material support or resources to designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), which includes both tangible and intangible resources. This applies not just to combat-related activities but to non-combat roles as well, such as amplifying terrorist propaganda. The statute encompasses any form of service or expertise that furthers the goals of terrorist organizations.

Given this framework, it begs the question: does hosting and amplifying terrorist propaganda—whether through live streams, events where terrorists are met with standing ovations, or YouTube channels—constitute material support for terrorism? Based on the legal precedent set by cases like Mehanna's, the answer could very well be yes.

Breakthrough News and the People's Forum could, and indeed should, face increased scrutiny for their roles in hosting interviews with terrorist leaders, glorifying terrorist attacks, and facilitating communication that furthers the agenda of foreign terrorist organizations. These actions mirror the kind of conduct that has led to material support convictions in the past, and it is critical that we do not allow these activities to go unchecked under the guise of free speech or journalism.

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Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Goldenberg. Now I call Mr. Walter for his 5 minutes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/boston/press-releases/2012/tarek-mehanna-sentenced-in-boston-to-17-years-in-prison-on-terrorism-related-charges>

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT WALTER, PRESIDENT, CAPITAL  
RESEARCH CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. WALTER. Chairman Gosar, Vice Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Stansbury, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the honor of testifying. I am President of the Capitol Research Center, where we study radical activists. I applaud your attention to the outrages perpetrated on Park Service land by groups who support violence in the Middle East and America.

Free speech is precious. It is both the mark of a free country and also the means of our self-government. But speech is not violence, and violence is not speech. The radicals often make those claims.

The extremists who rioted in July exalt violence, teach techniques of violence, and justify violence. They attack the very possibility of free government, which requires that citizens and government officials be able to speak and debate freely as they try to achieve their desired policies through rational argument, rather than by using violence to coerce those who disagree with them.

But the radicals you are investigating despise free governments and democracies like America and Israel. They love tyrannies that rule by violence, like Mao's Communist China, the mullahs' Iranian theocracy, and Lenin's Soviet Union. They follow Mao's diktat: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Without violence, these extremists cannot achieve the dreams they graffitied onto Columbus Circle monuments: U.S. Empire Will Burn, Israel Will Fall. They spray-painted " Hamas is coming," which means these radicals want Americans to suffer the bloody violence Hamas perpetrates on Israelis.

As I testified to you in April, America faces a convergence of extremist groups. Take, for instance, radical environmentalists like Interior Secretary Haaland's friends and family at Pueblo Action Alliance, a group that not only exalts violence, but joined in a riotous protest at the Interior Department that resulted in dozens of arrests and sent a policeman to the hospital. These environmental activists also support radical Palestinian activists, who turn around and support other radical groups ostensibly dedicated to climate activism, anti-police activism, and more.

In radical minds, all particular causes are part of a single cause: the revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor. As a 1960s American radical put it, "The issue is never the issue. The issue is always the revolution."

Similarly, the protesters this July chanted, "There is only one solution: intifada, revolution." But to endorse intifada is to endorse violence. Israel's last intifada did not result in any effort to persuade others through rational speech and peaceful protest. It resulted in thousands of dead Palestinians and Israelis.

Of the 250-plus endorsers of the July riot in DC, my colleague, Ryan Mauro, identified 90 extremist groups that publicly support Hamas' terrorism or identify as Marxist, communist, or anarchist revolutionaries. These radicals work closely with foreign tyrannies opposed to America. For example, Mauro observed that ANSWER, the leader of July's riot, signed a declaration of the committee of anti-imperialists in solidarity with Iran that backs Iran's direct attack on Israel and explicitly chooses the side of the Iran-led axis

of resistance consisting of the Governments of Syria, Iran-backed Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic jihad, Hezbollah, the Yemen-based Houthis, and Iran-backed militias in Iraq who are trying to kill U.S. troops.

One more bloodthirsty tyranny ANSWER supports is Putin's Russia, which ANSWER favors over the United States and NATO.

I do not say that every critic of American or Israeli policy has succumbed to this nihilistic lust for violence and tyranny. And I emphatically do say that peaceful protests and vigorous debate over foreign policy are entirely legitimate in our free country. But this Committee and the National Park Service that has the responsibility of overseeing protests in the nation's capital should continue investigating what went badly wrong in July, and determine how to prevent similar misdeeds in the future. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Walter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SCOTT WALTER, PRESIDENT, CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER

Chairman Gosar, Vice Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Stansbury, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the honor of testifying. I'm president of the Capital Research Center, where for decades we have studied non-profits and extremist groups.

I applaud the full Natural Resources Committee and this subcommittee for your attention to the outrages perpetrated on Park Service land by groups who often had ties to foreign powers. These groups' violence on federal land fits with the groups' support of violence in the Middle East and with their violence-soaked ideology.

In considering the riot at Union Station, we should immediately distinguish between violence and speech. Free speech is precious in a free country. That's why the very First Amendment protects speech in general and why the first Article of the Constitution protects the "Speech and Debate" of Members of Congress in either house. But speech is not violence, and violence is not speech, even though we often hear radicals making both those claims.<sup>1</sup> As Rutgers Professor Mark Bray explained in his *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, these radicals believe "'free speech' as such is merely a bourgeois fantasy unworthy of consideration."<sup>2</sup>

Extremists who urge violence in protests are attacking the possibility of free government, which requires citizens and government officials to be able to speak and debate freely as they try to achieve their desired policies through rational argument, rather than by using violence to coerce those who disagree with them. But the kind of radicals who led the violent protests you're investigating despise free governments and democracies like America and Israel. Instead, as I will document, they love tyrannies like Mao's Communist China, the mullahs' Iranian theocracy, and Lenin's Soviet Union—all regimes ruled by violence. Mao explained this ideology's essence: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."<sup>3</sup>

Without violence, how are these extremists to achieve the dreams they graffitied onto Columbus Circle monuments, such as "US Empire will burn" and "Israel will fall"? Or take another of their graffiti slogans, "Hamas is comin'."<sup>4</sup> What does that mean but that the bloody violence Hamas perpetrated on Israelis on October 7, 2023, will—so these radicals hope—be visited upon Americans?

Some of the groups who organized that protest are focused on Middle East issues, but other groups focus on entirely different issues. This lumping together of numerous causes may puzzle ordinary Americans, but it is standard for the radical Left,

<sup>1</sup>See Haidt, Jonathan and Greg Lukianoff. "Why It's a Bad Idea to Tell Students Words Are Violence: A claim increasingly heard on campus will make them more anxious and more willing to justify physical harm." *The Atlantic*, July 18, 2017; <https://archive.is/GzJRC>.

<sup>2</sup>Turley, Jonathan. "'Your speech is violence': the left's new mantra to justify campus violence." *The Hill*, June 3, 2023; <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/4032778-your-speech-is-violence-the-lefts-new-mantra-to-justify-campus-violence/>. This article cites several more "speech is violence" claims.

<sup>3</sup>Quotations from chairman Mao Tsetung; [https://archive.org/details/isbn\\_9780835123884/page/60/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780835123884/page/60/mode/2up).

<sup>4</sup>Costescu, Jessica. "Pro-Hamas Agitators Burn American Flag and Foist Palestinian Flag Over Union Station as Bibi Addresses Congress," *Free Beacon*, July 24, 2024; <https://freebeacon.com/israel/pro-hamas-agitators-burn-american-flag-wave-terrorist-flags-clash-with-police-as-israeli-pm-addresses-congress/>. Underlining in original graffiti.

which views all sorts of discrete causes as united under what is sometimes called “the omnicause.”

“In many students’ eyes,” the *New York Times* reported, “the war in Gaza is linked to other issues, such as policing, mistreatment of Indigenous people, racism and the impact of climate change.”<sup>5</sup>

Classic examples of this agglomerating of seemingly disparate left-wing causes appeared in my testimony to this committee in April. I noted that Code Pink, known for its foreign policy focus, both protested its support for Hamas in far-off Gaza and also jumped on the domestic environmentalist bandwagon to advocate for the Green New Deal.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, another radical group, Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA),

seamlessly connects radical environmental views with radical foreign policy views and shows a fondness for revolutionary violence—all obvious just from the front page of PAA’s website. That landing page currently shows a PAA flyer for the COP28 climate conference that includes radical environmentalism (denouncing carbon capture, hydrogen, water and nuclear power; demanding a complete phase-out of fossil fuels), radical feminism (calling for “feminist regenerative economies”), and radical anti-Israel policies (“solidarity with our Palestine relatives”).<sup>7</sup>

In radicals’ minds, all particular causes are part of a single cause: the revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor. As one 1960s American radical put it, “The issue is never the issue. The issue is always the revolution.” That’s likely what this July’s protestors meant when they chanted, “There is only one solution, intifada revolution.”<sup>8</sup> To endorse intifada is to endorse violence. The last intifada did not result in debate or an effort to persuade others through rational speech and peaceful protest. It resulted in thousands of deaths among Palestinians and Israelis.

An essay popular among American radicals, “10 Anarchist Theses on Palestine Solidarity in the United States,” reiterates the omnicause theme and the death wish: “our main task as revolutionaries in the United States remains to be the unmaking of the American empire. Anarchists are for solidarity with Palestine . . . ***Freedom for Palestine means Death to America.***”<sup>9</sup>

My Capital Research Center colleague Ryan Mauro has documented this phenomenon in a lengthy report, *Marching Toward Violence: The Domestic Anti-Israeli Protest Movement*.<sup>10</sup> As Mauro explains, dozens of groups involved in disruptive anti-Israel protests are “pro-terrorism.” That is, they support Hamas and/or the October 7 terrorist attacks, and many possess a militancy that pushes the movement “toward a wider, more severe campaign focused on property destruction and violence properly described as domestic terrorism.” The movement’s

long-term goals are revolutionary. It demands the “dismantlement” of America’s “colonialist,” “imperialist,” or “capitalist” system, often calling for the U.S. to be abolished as a country.<sup>11</sup>

Looking specifically at the 250+ endorsers of the July 2024 violent protests in Washington, D.C., Mauro quickly identified 90 that qualify as extremist groups. That is, they publicly support terrorism/Hamas or identify themselves as Marxist, communist, or anarchist, which means they are anti-American aspiring revolutionaries.

For example, CUNY for Palestine endorsed the rally and is pro-Hamas and pro-violence. In fact, Capital Research Center broke the story that it had arguably become a terrorist group itself by identifying as part of the Iran-led “Axis of

<sup>5</sup>Peters, Jeremy W. “It’s Not Just Gaza: Student Protesters See Links to a Global Struggle,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2024; <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/01/us/pro-palestinian-college-protests.html>.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/117026/witnesses/HHRG-118-II15-Wstate-WalterS-20240430.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Costescu, Jessica. “Pro-Hamas Agitators Burn American Flag and Foist Palestinian Flag Over Union Station as Bibi Addresses Congress,” *Free Beacon*, July 24, 2024; <https://freebeacon.com/israel/pro-hamas-agitators-burn-american-flag-wave-terrorist-flags-clash-with-police-as-israeli-pm-addresses-congress/>.

<sup>9</sup>Emphasis in original; [https://archive.org/download/zines-war/10\\_Anarchist\\_Theses\\_on\\_Palestine\\_Solidarity\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States-screen.pdf](https://archive.org/download/zines-war/10_Anarchist_Theses_on_Palestine_Solidarity_in_the_United_States-screen.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>Mauro, Ryan. *Marching Toward Violence: The Domestic Anti-Israeli Protest Movement*. Capital Research Center, October 9, 2024; <https://capitalresearch.org/article/marching-toward-violence-the-domestic-anti-israeli-protest-movement/>.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Resistance” that includes Hamas and the other Iran-backed terrorists.<sup>12</sup> In a statement, it declared, “The city of New York and their pigs are going to keep brutalizing and escalating, and so will we.”<sup>13</sup> Note that this is an example of combining radical anti-Israel ideology with radical anti-police ideology.

In his *Marching Toward Violence* report, Mauro discusses in detail the two groups whose leadership in the July riots most disturbs the Committee: the ANSWER Coalition and the broader coalition to which it belongs, Shut It Down for Palestine. Both these “coalitions,” Mauro documents, “glorify and assist illegal protests of varying severity.” They “encourage those crimes by directing activists to militant websites that teach how to fight police, destroy property, and commit other guerrilla acts.”<sup>14</sup>

For example, ANSWER explicitly lauds protesters who “have shut down highways, train stations [like Union Station], and bridges in the United States.” ANSWER “signed a declaration of the Committee of Anti-Imperialists in Solidarity with Iran that backs Iran’s direct attack on Israel and explicitly chooses the side of the Iran-led ‘Axis of Resistance’ consisting of the government of Syria, Iran-backed Palestinian terrorist groups including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, the Yemen-based Houthis and Iran-backed militias in Iraq who are trying to kill U.S. troops.” These bloodthirsty entities who rule by violence do not exhaust ANSWER’s loyalties. The coalition also supports Putin’s bellicose Russia by denouncing the “US and NATO proxy war in Ukraine.”<sup>15</sup>

ANSWER, like many extremist groups in the anti-Israel orbit, enjoys the privileges of a tax-exempt charity, but rather than having to publicly report its finances, employees, board members, and the like in the way independent charities must, it hides itself in the cloak of a “fiscal sponsorship,” a situation where a parent charity extends its tax-exempt status to a project like ANSWER while relieving the project of the burden of public disclosures of its internal operations.

Worse, ANSWER’s fiscal sponsor is Progress Unity Fund, a far-left 501(c)(3) “charity” which also fiscally sponsors Pivot to Peace, one of whose members was arrested in 2023 for illegally acting as a foreign agent for China.<sup>16</sup> InfluenceWatch reports it “is closely connected to the Workers World Party (WWP) and its break-away group, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), both of which are revolutionary Marxist-Leninist parties” that celebrate revolutionary violence.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1960s, the WWP worked with violent extremists in the Weather Underground, which conducted dozens of bombings. Later it would demand the release of convicted cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal,<sup>18</sup> and more recently its leaders traveled to North Korea to celebrate the anniversary of the “tremendous victory” of Communist North Korea in the Korean War. In this celebration of solidarity with the most brutally repressive regime on the planet, the WWP reports it was joined by the ANSWER coalition.<sup>19</sup> Brian Becker and other leaders of ANSWER are Workers World Party members, and ANSWER has been described as “an outgrowth” and a “front” for the Party.<sup>20</sup>

The Progress Unity Fund’s ties to the Party for Socialism and Liberation, which formed the Fund, are arguably even more disturbing. This party backs the Chinese Communist Party’s murderous repression of the Tiananmen Square student democracy movement, even as it still supports the Soviet Union’s murderous repression of a popular uprising against its rule in Hungary in 1956.<sup>21</sup>

Such loyalty to the current Chinese Communist Party’s leaders may result in financial support from the Party and deserves investigation, which brings us to the larger coalition, Shut It Down for Palestine.

<sup>12</sup><https://capitalresearch.org/article/cuny-for-palestine-vows-to-destroy-university-and-target-nyc/>.

<sup>13</sup><https://cryptpad.fr/pad/#/2/pad/view/uQ2Yro0KM65RaVe46ZEwM7LgVS1st41eQ2S07UaHMDI/>.

<sup>14</sup>Mauro, *Marching Toward Violence*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>16</sup><https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-801204>.

<sup>17</sup><https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/progress-unity-fund/>.

<sup>18</sup><https://workersworld-party.org/about/>.

<sup>19</sup>Holmes, Larry. “What Workers Need to Know About Korea.” *Workers World*, August 28, 2013; <https://www.workers.org/2013/08/10587/>.

<sup>20</sup>Corn, David. “Behind the Placards.” *LA Weekly*, November 7, 2002; <https://web.archive.org/web/20081103052350/http://www.laweekly.com/2002-11-07/news/behind-the-placards>.

<sup>21</sup><https://socialism.com/fs-article/a-political-critique-of-the-party-for-socialism-and-liberation/>.

Shut It Down lists<sup>22</sup> as its members the following groups:

Palestinian Youth Movement  
 National Students for Justice in Palestine  
 ANSWER coalition  
 The People's Forum  
 International Peoples' Assembly  
 Al-Awda-NY  
 Palestinian American Community Center

Note that National Students for Justice in Palestine has stated in a toolkit that it distributes, "We as Palestinian students in exile are PART of this movement, not in solidarity with this movement." It does not name the movement, but since Hamas is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement, Students for Justice is clearly claiming to *be* Hamas.<sup>23</sup>

As for The People's Forum, it is "funded by Mr. [Neville Roy] Singham," reports the *New York Times* in a story whose headline explains how Singham, who now lives in Shanghai, is a tool of Chinese Communist Party propaganda: "A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a U.S. Tech Mogul: The Times unraveled a financial network that stretches from Chicago to Shanghai and uses American nonprofits to push Chinese talking points worldwide."<sup>24</sup> The *Times* adds that Singham's groups enjoy hundreds of millions of dollars of funding and combine "progressive advocacy with Chinese government talking points."

In a thorough report on Shut It Down, the Network Contagion Research Institute observes that its seven Convenors divide into "two distinct groupings based on ideological affiliation and fiscal sponsorship." First, the far-left members; namely, The People's Forum, International People's Assembly, and ANSWER Coalition, which "demonstrate significant financial, personnel, and operational overlap." Second, the remaining four Convenors, "all pro-Palestinian activist organizations, with at least two, [National Students for Justice in Palestine] and Al-Awda, known to have ties to U.S.-designated terrorist organizations." In addition, Shut It Down is endorsed by Samidoun, "which some Western intelligence services classify as a front for the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) which is designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, Germany, and Israel."<sup>25</sup>

Here again we see how the anti-Israel movement has two branches: one composed of far-left radical groups pushing a variety of agenda items; the other made up of explicitly Palestinian-focused groups. Yet they all work together, based on a shared hatred of Israel, America, and other democracies, and on a shared love of tyrannies like Communist China.

Unfortunately, these extremists don't just love violence when it's practiced in those repressive tyrannies. They also desire to see violence practiced in this country, as we see in both their slogans like "Hamas is comin'" and "US Empire will burn" as well as their actual violence in July in Washington.

I do not say that every critic of American or Israeli policy has succumbed to this nihilistic longing for violence and tyranny, and I emphatically do say that peaceful protests and vigorous debates over foreign policy are legitimate in our free country. But this committee, and the National Park Service that has the weighty responsibility of overseeing protests in most of the nation's capital, should continue investigating what went badly wrong in July and should ponder how to prevent similar misdeeds in the future. As Ronald Reagan famously warned, "Freedom is . . . never more than one generation away from extinction."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.shutitdown4palestine.org/about>.

<sup>23</sup> [Students for Justice in Palestine]. "Day of Resistance Toolkit—imgix." October 12, 2023; <https://dw-wp-production.imgix.net/2023/10/DAY-OF-RESISTANCE-TOOLKIT.pdf>, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/05/world/europe/neville-roy-singham-china-propaganda.html>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://networkcontagion.us/reports/ccp-influence-and-radical-ideologies/>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony>.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO SCOTT WALTER, PRESIDENT, CAPITAL  
RESEARCH CENTER

**Questions Submitted by Representative D'Esposito**

*Question 1. Mr. Walter, in your opening statement, you described how radical organizations like Answer Coalition demonstrate blatant violence, loyalty to foreign adversaries, and have signed declarations in solidarity with Iran. You also stated that they “explicitly choose the side of the Iran-led ‘Axis of Resistance,’” which includes the government of Syria, Iran-backed Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, the Yemen-based Houthis, and Iran-backed militias in Iraq.*

*1a) Considering that groups at Union Station have a documented history of violence and promoting terrorist ideologies—actions that violate 18 U.S. Code §2339B—do you believe a permit should be granted to an organization with a known history of supporting the ideology of a terrorist group responsible for attacks on U.S. soil?*

*1b) For example, if there were an attack on our homeland by Hamas or Hezbollah, and organizations like Answer Coalition, SJP, Code Pink, or Shut It Down for Palestine continued to act as they have since October 7th and July 24th, do you think they would legally be allowed to secure a permit?*

Answer. Thank you for the question, Rep. D'Esposito. Both parts of your question involve permit policy for the National Park Service (NPS), which neither my colleagues at the Capital Research Center nor I have studied, so my ability to comment is limited. As far as I could follow the discussion of this policy at the hearing, there seemed to be a consensus that the laws and regulations governing NPS permit policy were inadequate to the serious threats posed by radical extremists like ANSWER Coalition, which violated its permit this July at Union Station.

My personal, non-expert opinion would be that NPS should have ways to determine whether groups seeking to demonstrate have in the past violated demonstration permits, in which case NPS should have authority to protect federal lands from violent extremists whose actions indicate they seek not peaceful protest but unlawful violence.

While the First Amendment dictates that all Americans have the right to peaceably assemble and petition the Government for a redress of grievances, this sacred right protects speech, not violence. ANSWER and other extremists clearly have a chilling attachment to violence, as I testified. Their right to access public grounds should not be limited on the basis of their voicing unpopular opinions, but in principle that right could be limited on the basis of their committing or supporting acts of violence. To my non-expert ears, it sounds as if the NPS may need Congress to clarify or strengthen the Service's ability to refrain from issuing permits to groups with a history of violent actions.

My colleagues and I at Capital Research Center likewise uphold the right of Americans to associate freely, including by forming nonprofit groups. But as you rightly observe, there is a statutory limit to this right of association; namely, such groups may not provide “material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization,” and if they do, they face not only the loss of tax-exempt status but criminal penalties. As outlined in Capital Research Center's recent report by Ryan Mauro, *Marching Toward Violence*, many dozens of nonprofits, including the ANSWER Coalition, are in fact supporting terrorism yet have not received the proper legal consequences from the Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Department.<sup>1</sup> That explains why the House recently passed H.R. 6408 to encourage the Secretary of the Treasury to act to ensure this law is upheld.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, any nonprofit group that violates the law against support for terrorism should not be able to continue any activities as a nonprofit, including to obtain NPS demonstration permits. How best to deal with the current difficulties in this situation I must leave to the relevant Congressional Committees.

<sup>1</sup>Mauro, Ryan. *Marching Toward Violence: The Domestic Anti-Israeli Protest Movement*. Capital Research Center, October 9, 2024; <https://capitalresearch.org/article/marching-toward-violence-the-domestic-anti-israeli-protest-movement/>.

<sup>2</sup>H.R. 6408, “To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to terminate the tax-exempt status of terrorist supporting organizations.” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6408>.



Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. I am now going to go to the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, for his first 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Spencer, I am concerned there is a disconnect. As an outside observer, it doesn't appear to me that the Department officials are communicating effectively with the officers on the ground and the ones that are putting their life on the line every day, and I just want to get your input. How well does leadership in the Park Service coordinate with officers and take your input on issues such as safety and security threats, and particularly as it relates to events like what happened on July 24?

Mr. SPENCER. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

I mean, to say it in the best terms that I can is we work under the National Park Service, and these are bureaucrats that have never worked law enforcement with the United States Park Police ever. Since we are directly under them, there is a huge disconnect between what we do as a law enforcement agency in urban areas.

The vast majority of visitor and resource protection for the National Park Service is with your huge parks and everything that is out West there patrolled by law enforcement rangers, and a lot of people get us confused with them. We are an urban law enforcement agency under the National Park Service that works in Washington, New York, and San Francisco. We are one of the most public-facing law enforcement agencies in the Federal Government for uniformed police. And with that said, nobody in the National Park Service has any experience with what we do, in my opinion.

I actually believe we should be our own bureau under the Department of the Interior, and I think that might help things a little more. I also believe our Chief of Police should have been here today, and not somebody from the National Park Service who has never worn our uniform or been involved with some type of civil unrest, especially in Washington, DC.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And when Park Service police run into issues like you experienced on July 24, and you asked for additional reinforcements, what kind of process do you have to go through and how did that process work on July 24?

Mr. SPENCER. Well, yes, sir, that would be our executive command staff that does that with the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior if they want to request additional resources.

From what I know, if that would have happened, it would have fell on our budget. And our budget is already as slim as it can be. We can barely afford to hire 24 people a year right now per Fiscal Year.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And that is even though there was \$500 million set aside in the so-called Inflation Reduction Act?

Mr. SPENCER. Correct, sir. And I don't know where that money went. It certainly didn't make it down to the United States Park Police, from what I understand, to the best of my knowledge.

But I do know our budget, right now, my chief, she is frustrated as well with how much money we have to operate with the current staffing levels that we have. If we would have asked for additional

resources, it would have fell on our budget, and that is including lodging, travel, and then, of course, the salaries and the overtime of the people that are coming out here to help us out.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, I have more questions, I am going to move on to Mr. Goldenberg.

Are you aware of any direct or indirect involvement by Mr. Singham in the events of July 24?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Mr. Singham is, based on reporting from the *New York Times*, the *Daily Beast*, and our own independent reporting, a major funder behind the People's Forum, which is the convener behind the Shut It Down for Palestine movement. I think it just so happened that Brian Becker of the ANSWER Coalition was listed as person in charge. It was really an event hosted broadly by the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, that is supported by the People's Forum, that is supported by Mr. Singham in Shanghai.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, and as you mentioned, it has been widely reported that Mr. Singham is an advocate for the Chinese Communist Party within the United States. Can you explain his long-standing connections to the CCP?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Yes, absolutely. As stated in my testimony and letters sent by members of the House Ways and Means Committee to the IRS, Mr. Singham operates out of Shanghai and shares an office space with a group called Maku Media, a Chinese media company that openly shares its stated goal to "tell China's story well," a phrase commonly associated with foreign propaganda.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, how does China stand to benefit from these disruptive and divisive protests that are associated with Mr. Singham?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. It is my belief that Mr. Singham, potentially at the behest of the CCP, we know he has long-standing relationships with the CCP, seek to leverage the People's Forum and other non-profits funded by Singham—

Mr. WESTERMAN. I am running out of time.

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Oh, I am sorry, sir.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I have to get one more question in. If the CCP is not bad enough, do we know if he has any direct or indirect ties to the terrorist organization Hamas?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. I don't know, but I know the organizations he funds are very supportive of Hamas, ideologically.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Arkansas. The gentleman from New Mexico, the Ranking Member, Ms. Stansbury, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate the tenor at the end of the last panel of really seeking solutions and to better understand the structural constraints that are on Park Police, how, as policy matters, we review applications, how our Park Police and the Federal Government decide how to do permitting, et cetera.

To that end, Mr. Spencer, I really appreciate you being here. Thank you for your service. Thank you for representing our law enforcement officers. I want to pull on the thread a little bit more that you have been talking about with resources. And also you

mentioned that several dozen members of the force have left over the last several years. Talk to us a little bit more about that.

How are budgetary constraints affecting the Park Police force? And why do you believe that members of the law enforcement community that you work with are leaving?

Mr. SPENCER. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

Basically, right now, to quickly answer it, in DC alone we are supposed to have 432 Park Police officers sworn. Right now, we have 334. So, just DC alone, we are roughly 100 officers below staffing, which is huge. And because of that there is a vicious cycle of continuously canceling days off. And to put it into perspective, in 2016 we had 30 days of our officers' days off canceled for special events and First Amendment activities.

Fast forward to today, 2024. We had 72 so far this year, and maybe even more since I looked at that number. So, that is one of the reasons. And with the low staffing, we are consistently always having to work upwards of 18-hour shifts just to do our jobs, and people get stressed out, burned out, and they say I could go to another Federal law enforcement agency for better pay and not have to be so forward-facing with the public and have to deal with these contentious civil unrest and some of the jobs that we have.

That is basically the meat and the potatoes of why people walk out the door. We are behind the eight ball when it comes to our pay scale. Our pay scale, it takes 30 years to max out. Other law enforcement agencies are looking at 20, 22 years. We have a lot of veterans that work for the United States Park Police that will never, including myself, I will never reach our max pay because I will age out before we are able to do that for our retirement.

So, those are some of the reasons why people are walking out the door right now.

Ms. STANSBURY. Is it your sense that your colleagues that you work with enjoy the job and, notwithstanding having to work long overtime and these pay issues, that they would like to stay with the force but it is just folks are getting burned out, they are not getting paid enough, and this is a tough gig here in DC? Is that your sense of it?

Mr. SPENCER. Yes, ma'am. I mean, the job itself is great. When I came on this job, at one point we were upwards of 650 officers strong, and that lessened the workload, that made it more enjoyable. Days off weren't canceled nearly as much.

I mean, what we were able to do in the past is, you take a simple special event that occurs downtown in DC. We had extra patrols on the street that could supplement some of the activities that we would have to do to stand up a detail for a special event. We have five stations in the DC area, so they would pull the extra officers down and have them work that event on their straight time during their regular shift. The way it is now is almost every event that we have in Washington, DC, your days off are canceled for that, and that is because we can't staff it with our regularly-assigned patrols anymore. We don't have enough people to do so.

Ms. STANSBURY. Got it. Well, this sounds like something that we can actually work on here in Congress. I know that law enforcement, all levels of government, Federal, tribal, state, local are struggling to catch up and modernize their pay scales. I know in

the state of New Mexico we had to adjust retirement and pay scales for both law enforcement and first responders in our fire departments. So, I would propose to my colleagues across the aisle this is potentially a bipartisan issue that we can work on in the Federal budget, and something that would have a demonstrable impact on the Park Service's ability to serve.

With that, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlelady for her comments. It sounds great. I now recognize the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Spencer, I want to begin by thanking you personally for your service, along with the dedicated men and women of the United States Park Police. Like you, I am proud to have worn the uniform, so I recognize the sacrifices that not only you and the men and women you represent, but also all of your families make. They make the commitment each and every day.

And as Ranking Member Stansbury said, you want to lower morale in a department? You force overtime. You take their vacations away that they have been planning for 4 months. I can't imagine working 18, 19 hours a day with limited rest and being forced to come back in. And to be honest, it was very clear this past July that you did not receive the respect that you deserved. And this isn't right.

In your written testimony, you discussed the challenges the U.S. Park Police faced on July 24, due in no small part because of the lack of resources, namely personnel. As the U.S. Park Police is called on to respond to countless planned and special events within DC each year, this can't be an outlier.

Mr. Spencer, how often does the Park Police face these resource and staffing shortages for planned events?

Mr. SPENCER. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

As far as planned events, special events?

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Mr. SPENCER. It is a lot. I don't have the number with me right now, but we are constantly inundated. If you look at our weekly bulletin, the agency puts out information on which days off will be canceled. And they try to give us a heads up for the big ones that we know that is going to happen every year. But every so often a permit will just come right through, and I get a call from somebody in the executive command staff saying, "I am sorry, but just let your officers know we are going to be putting out information that your days off are canceled in the next few days or so."

Mr. STAUBER. Would you say that upwards of 90 percent of the events that are planned or come through that need a permit, that you have to either cancel someone's overtime or their vacation so you can properly staff them? Would that be correct?

Mr. SPENCER. I don't have that number in front of me, but that is reasonable to say so, yes.

Mr. STAUBER. How often does the Park Police request additional units from other stations outside of Washington, DC or from other jurisdictions completely?

Mr. SPENCER. For the big events that we have planned yearly, like the 4th of July and then every 4 years, the inauguration is another big one that we work, those ones typically we ask for outside

resources, and that comes out of a separate budget from the United States Park Police itself. That is funded from another law enforcement budget.

Mr. STAUBER. Speaking of budgets, \$500 million was dedicated out of the IRA for hiring in the Park Police. We noted from earlier testimony that only \$19 million went for hiring. Where do you think the other \$481 million went?

Mr. SPENCER. I have no idea. And I did hear Mr. Cuvelier say that it was \$29 million. I don't have that information, but the people I have talked to in my leadership, I have been told \$19 million.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes. In fact, Mr. Cuvelier, he erred. There was a government report that I actually entered into the record that said it was \$19 million.

So, when you have a planned event, how often are these requests fulfilled by your staff? Let's say you have a planned event and you need 35, well, let's say 40, additional staff for that event. How often do you get those 40 officers voluntarily without forcing them overtime and without taking their time off? Does that make sense? Does the question make sense?

Mr. SPENCER. Yes. Almost never.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Mr. SPENCER. I mean, if there is an event in DC, for the most part, unless it is something small enough where, like, our Special Forces branch where we have SWAT and K9, if they are not doing a mission or working the street and if they are available, they will try and supplement that first if it is downtown.

But no, if there is an event in DC, most likely somebody's days off are going to be canceled, and that is all the time.

Mr. STAUBER. Again, I spent 23 years in uniform. I was only forced once to come in, and that was at Y2K. Everybody, I think, around the nation. That was it. You start forcing these men and women to forego their family vacations or their days off, or forcing them to overtime, you are going to have a morale problem, and you are seeing this. It is sad that we put the law enforcement men and women in this position.

I think that, as the Chairman understands, there needs to be a discussion about this. You have to properly staff. Otherwise, you are going to burn the men and women out. And when you start burning them out, they make mistakes, unintentional, you know, and the quality of life, we can raise your quality of life. We must raise your pay to make it equal with other law enforcement, Federal law enforcement officers.

I am very concerned with your comments about the morale. I want to assure you I will do everything I can to make sure the men and women who serve on our National Park Police are given the resources that they need to successfully deal with any situation they are given. I don't want next year you coming in front of this Committee and saying so many were forced overtime, so many had to take their vacations off. You talk about a family destroyer, right? Thank you for your service.

I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. Thanks for going down that line.

Mr. Spencer, I am going to ask you some questions. Hopefully, you can answer these.

Do you feel that your leadership gives you enough advance notice or advanced training for these events?

Mr. SPENCER. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman. Our leadership does. They do as best they can. And I see their frustration, too.

I mean, let's be clear. The Chief, our Special Events Unit, when they get these permits coming in they don't want to call me and say, "Hey, I am taking your guys' and your girls' days off again." Like, they don't want to have to say that, but it happens a lot. And the fact is if National Park Service approves a permit, comes our way, and there is law enforcement need, we have to stand up a detail for it.

Dr. GOSAR. Are you ever consulted in advance about a group coming in, as to whether they are violent or anything like that?

Mr. SPENCER. We have an intel office, counterintelligence and counterterrorism, that when we have roll call that day, I can say that they will brief us if there is going to be any potential for violence with the incident.

Dr. GOSAR. But you are not given any advance to a group, let's say, that has a history of violence.

I am going to go back to qualify that. We have college campuses across the country that say, "This is your free speech zone." They can restrict even just to a zone. So, why would you have to actually OK a permit for a certain area if you go to some other area that might be more applicable, where it is more defensible? Why couldn't you do something like that?

Mr. SPENCER. Are you talking about stand up a detail for a specific area?

Dr. GOSAR. Yes, absolutely. You say, listen, we are not going to apply your permit for this area because we want to make sure that it has the resources you need, and we are going to direct you over here. Why couldn't you do that, or can you?

Mr. SPENCER. I represent the rank and file officers. We have no say in the permit process whatsoever. And I know our leadership in the United States Park Police, the Chief and the executive command staff, our Special Events Unit, they are at the table sometimes, but they also have a limited role in the permit process. They basically tell them what we can and can't do as far as our security posture goes. And then the National Park Service is the sole entity that takes care of the permitting.

Dr. GOSAR. So, that seems to me like that would be an area of collaboration we could actually do, you know, consultation. It seems like some people want to do free speech, but you know what? The timing may not be right. Maybe you can give them a different zone that they could go to. It seems like we have to have more consultation with those officers on the ground. Would you say that?

Mr. SPENCER. It would definitely be helpful if we could have a seat at the table. I know the union, we are not allowed at these meetings sometimes just because I might say something that they don't like. But I think the U.S. Park Police should have more of a role in the permit process, or at least be able to express their concerns more than what we do.

Dr. GOSAR. And transparency of allocated resources like money should be something on the table, should it not, for everybody to see where the money goes?

Mr. SPENCER. As far as——

Dr. GOSAR. Where the money goes.

Mr. SPENCER. The money from?

Dr. GOSAR. Well, that Congress allocates to the Park Service, don't you think?

Mr. SPENCER. I would absolutely love to see that myself, sir.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. Thank you very much, and thank you very much for your service.

Mr. Goldenberg, I think you were in the audience when I talked about disclosure on NGOs. For example, if they took one penny from the Federal Government directly or indirectly through a pass-through, they would be required by law to actually show us where they got that money. Transparency would be very good with that aspect, would it not?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Yes, absolutely. And if it wasn't for independent reporting into the People's Forum and the Singham Network, no one would have known where that money came from because it was being passed through a philanthropic fund connected to a major bank that hid his identity. So, there definitely needs to be more transparency into funding into the non-profit system.

Dr. GOSAR. Would you agree with that, Mr. Walter?

Mr. WALTER. With foreign funding, there definitely should be significantly more disclosure. I mean, on the one hand, American citizens have a serious right to privacy with their funding, but foreign nationals absolutely do not.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I think if you were taking Federal dollars, I think you have to have that transparency, don't you not, Mr. Walter?

Mr. WALTER. Well, yes——

Dr. GOSAR. Regardless if you are a citizen or non-citizen. I know there are limits on that aspect, but if it is taxable income, if it is given by the Federal Government, you have reporting requirements.

Mr. WALTER. Well, you are quite right. And when one group is giving to another group, that is not private citizens and should be disclosed. And Capital Research Center, where I work, has put out extensive suggestions for improving the IRS filings for fiscal sponsorships, for foreign funding and such things, and communicated with your colleagues at the Ways and Means Committee about this, who I think are taking an interest.

Dr. GOSAR. Now, I guess I have one more question for the two of you. Let's say that you had something that was business-related, something that would be applied to our defense of this country like, say, the grid, like an electrical company or a solar company that has access to the grid. Would you agree or could you give me some offers of why it would be inadequate to ask that a United States citizen or those who hold a green card from the United States are required to sit on any operating board or over any oversight board of that industry? Make sense?

Mr. GOLDENBERG. Yes, that falls outside of my area of expertise, but maybe Mr. Walter——

Mr. WALTER. Yes, it is a little beyond my area of expertise, although it certainly sounds reasonable on the face of it.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes. I guess what I am getting to is if you have a bad actor, then if they have a green card or they are a citizen of the United States, you have treason aspects that you can hold in law that you don't have with others.

With that being said, I think we are done with our questions. I thank all the witnesses for your participation.

There may be some more people that have some questions from the Committee, and we ask that you will respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee may submit their questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 13. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

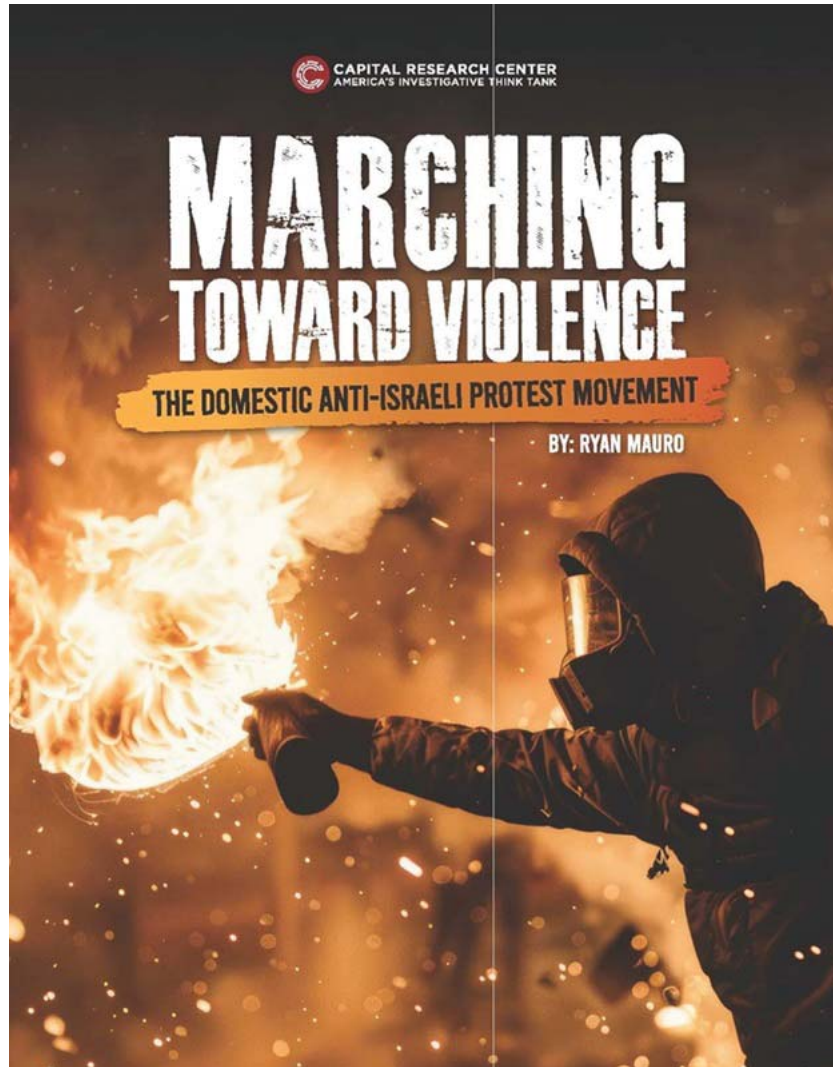
With that, the Subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:33 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]



[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

**Submissions for the Record by Rep. Westerman**



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The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II15/20241210/117646/HHRG-118-II15-20241210-SD009.pdf>

