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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Gregory T. Monahan
Acting Chief
U.S. Park Police
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3325
Washington, DC 20240

Secretary Bernhardt and Acting Chief Monahan,

In light of the disturbing accounts of U.S. Park Police (USPP) participation in the aggressive action against peaceful protesters in Lafayette Park on June 1, I write with great concern about the apparent justification of such tactics expressed in the statement released by Acting Chief Monahan dated June 2.

The mission of the U.S. Park Police 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.” None of those goals are served by using the officers of the USPP as a force to indiscriminately fire chemical agents and rubber bullets into a crowd of peaceful protestors exercising their first amendment rights. It is unacceptable to prioritize clearing the way for a photo opportunity for the President over allowing a legal, peaceful demonstration occurring prior to the city curfew. Everyday Americans have the right to stand up for our democracy in their public spaces. If there were individual violent agitators in an area, as you claim, the priority of the USPP should have been to protect the peaceful demonstrators, innocent bystanders, and fellow law enforcement. Instead, America and the world witnessed federal law enforcement officers broadly targeting a nonviolent crowd with flash bangs, rubber pellets and chemical agents.

As Chair of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee which funds the USPP and has oversight responsibilities for this federally taxpayer-funded force, I request that you provide answers to the following questions by 9 am on June 5, 2020.

- Who gave the order to the USPP officers to push protesters out of Lafayette Park? When was that order given?
- You stated that the USPP actions came in response to projectiles being thrown from individuals “on H Street NW”. If that is the case, why do eyewitnesses and reporters from the site, including the Rector of St. John’s Episcopal Church Gini Gerbasi as reported in the Washington Post, indicate that officers were pushing protesters from Lafayette Park towards H Street NW, at the north end of the park? Who made the tactical decision to move a nonviolent crowd towards what your own statement claims officers perceived to be a threat to health and safety?
- You stated that “no tear gas was used” by the USPP or other officers, but clearly chemical irritants were used given the symptoms suffered by protestors. How do you define “tear gas”, and were any chemical irritants used in the smoke or gas canisters fired into the protestors?
- You stated that “During four days of demonstrations, 51 members of the USPP were injured; of those, 11 were transported to the hospital and released and three were admitted.” Please provide to the committee the dates, locations and nature of these injuries, including if any were sustained prior to or during the incident at Lafayette Park on the evening of June 1.

Our national parks are public spaces, and the monuments and parks of our nation’s capital have long been a sanctuary for all Americans to make their voices heard and advance our common goal of forging a more perfect union. The actions taken against the American people on June 1, in order to provide President Trump’s photo opportunity at St. John’s Episcopal Church, are antithetical to those values.

Have your staff contact Rita Culp of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee staff with the responses to the questions above and to arrange a briefing, to be conducted remotely, for members of the committee to examine the role of the U.S. Park Police during the June 1 incident and the surrounding days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betty McCollum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Betty McCollum
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives