

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on "Oversight of the National Park Service" June 14, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today's hearing involves a variety of allegations at the National Park Service spanning several years.

I thank our witnesses for being here, including National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis and Deputy Inspector General Mary Kendall, whose office has issued many of the reports we will be discussing today.

For example, the Inspector General's office has identified an instance of contract steering at the Denver Service Center, the unauthorized purchase of automatic weapons at the Mojave National Preserve, and the improper use of government housing at Yellowstone National Park.

As a result of the work of the Inspector General's office, we also learned that Director Jarvis violated Federal ethics rules when he wrote and published a book without clearing it through the Department's Ethics Office.

Although he does not appear to have benefitted financially, he showed contempt for government ethics rules when he told the Inspector General's office that he probably would do the same thing again today because he has "always pushed the envelope."

As a result, he has now been stripped of his authority over ethics at the National Park Service and is undergoing mandatory ethics training himself.

Most troubling of all, however, the reports from the Inspector General's office detail "a long-term pattern of sexual harassment and hostile work environment" at the Grand Canyon River District.

The Grand Canyon's former Superintendent received a report in 2013 documenting multiple allegations of sexual harassment, but that report did not determine whether further investigation was warranted or whether disciplinary action should be pursued.

A year later, 13 current and former employees sent their allegations of abusive behavior to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary referred these allegations to the Inspector General for investigation.

The Inspector General's office identified 22 other individuals who "reported experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment and hostile work environments." The Inspector General's office also found that previous reports of sexual harassment "were not properly investigated or reported."

In addition, within the last few days, the Inspector General's office issued a new report detailing "a pattern of sexual harassment" against three female employees by a law enforcement supervisor at Canaveral National Seashore.

These reports obviously raise very serious issues. Women have the right to work anywhere—including within our national parks—without fear that they may be harassed by fellow employees or ignored or even retaliated against by managers when they report these abuses.

The Park Service's Equal Employment Opportunity program—the program directly responsible for handling complaints of harassment and retaliation—does not meet some of the most basic standards of a model program.

These reports demonstrate how critical it is that the Senate pass my bill, the Federal Employee Antidiscrimination Act, which Chairman Chaffetz co-sponsored and which passed the House by a vote of 403 to 0.

Finally, I want to highlight one more issue that needs urgent attention, and that is funding for the rehabilitation of the Arlington Memorial Bridge, which was built in 1932 across the Potomac River to connect the Lincoln Memorial with Arlington National Cemetery.

Unfortunately, an inspection in February found that the bridge has severely deteriorated. If a complete overhaul does not begin by 2019, the bridge is slated to be shut down within five years.

Rehabilitating the bridge is estimated to cost \$250 million, while the National Park Service's entire transportation budget for 2016 is \$268 million. This is an issue that Congress needs to address, and I hope our witnesses here today will be able to discuss this as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.