



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JUN 05 2020

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

Thirty years ago, on May 14, 1990, I was fortunate to witness an oral argument at the Supreme Court of the United States. The matter before the Court that day concerned whether the First Amendment permitted prosecution for flag burning in violation of the Flag Protection Act of 1989. When the Court handed down its verdict a few weeks later, I stood and watched a peaceful demonstration on the steps of the Court. The Court's determination was that the prosecutions under the Flag Protection Act were not supportable under the First Amendment.

Since that moment, I have profoundly appreciated the Constitutional protections that we, as Americans, enjoy and the seriousness with which any effort by the government to limit those rights is, and should be, viewed. The ability to freely express our views is fundamental to our society, even when some might find the words or ideas being expressed offensive or disagreeable. Just as our Constitution protects such forms of speech, it guards our right to peaceably assemble.

After the Nation witnessed the horrific killing of George Floyd, seeing with their own eyes a loss of life that should never have occurred, many reacted. In doing so, many have sought to exercise their rights peacefully; some have not, turning instead to unlawful activity. The scope of the violence and destruction is significant. Neither the American people nor the peaceful demonstrators are defined by those who seek to terrorize our cities, vandalize our national memorials, ignite our sacred sites, or attack our law enforcement officers and fellow citizens. But the presence of these criminals and their acts of violence last weekend and into this week is indisputable.

The men and women in law enforcement, particularly the U.S. Park Police (USPP) in this instance, are charged with safeguarding lives, protecting our national treasures and symbols of democracy, and preserving the natural and cultural resources entrusted to the Department of the Interior. They do this with great honor. Since last Friday, however, our colleagues at the USPP have been subjected to violence; several sustained injuries, and some were hospitalized.

Beginning on Saturday, May 30, 2020, the USPP were under a state of siege, and routinely subject to attack by violent crowds. The incidents are numerous and include USPP officers having their police cars vandalized; being subject to bombardment by lighted flares, Molotov cocktails, rocks, bricks, bottles and other projectiles; and physical assault so violent that to date

over 50 area law enforcement officers have been injured to some degree and even taken to local hospitals. This includes one USPP officer so violently attacked that he required emergency surgery.

These acts of violence were accompanied by vandalism and disorderly conduct, such as the setting of numerous fires, including the burning of an historic structure at Lafayette Park as well as at St. John's Church; profane graffiti scrawled upon numerous public structures, including the World War II Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial; and multiple attempts to break through fence lines, bike racks, and other barriers designed to restrain crowds from entering secure areas. These are just a small sampling of the incidents faced by law enforcement prior to the gathering on June 1, 2020.

In light of the activities on last Friday and Saturday—and at the request of USPP—I requested the assistance of the National Guard through the Secretary of Defense to ensure we could maintain the security of President's Park, the National Mall, and other public properties. Fortunately, my request for assistance was accepted.

On the evening of June 1, 2020, crowds gathered near the White House complex and once again began assaulting law enforcement with projectiles while threatening to storm the secured areas. Law enforcement personnel at the scene issued an order for the demonstration to fall back. When the crowd failed to comply with this lawful order, police at the scene, including the USPP, responded by pushing the crowd back. While standard equipment, including shields, batons, and pepper balls were used to accomplish this, no tear gas was used by USPP or associated units at Lafayette Park, contrary to widely and erroneously reported assertions.

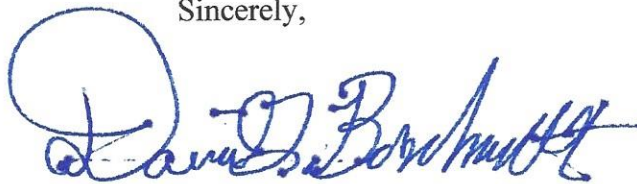
In working diligently to curtail the violence that was underway, acting USPP Chief Gregory T. Monahan has publicly stated that the USPP is following its established policy. The motto of the USPP is *Integrity, Honor, Service*. These special men and women display an unwavering commitment to serve and protect this great Nation, our national treasures and symbols of democracy, and the natural and cultural resources entrusted to us. I have personally visited Lafayette Park multiple times over the last week. I have seen firsthand the damage and destruction. I have talked to our men and women in blue. They exemplify continued bravery, serving with distinction. Politicizing their solemnity is unconscionable.

President Trump and I support justice and peace for every American. The President has committed his Administration to the expansion of economic opportunity and prosperity for all Americans. Under his leadership, criminal justice reform has been enacted, investments in underserved communities have been encouraged through opportunity zones, and, before the novel coronavirus outbreak, the unemployment rate among African Americans was recorded at its lowest in our Nation's history.

This Administration also remains absolutely and fundamentally committed to the peaceful expression of First Amendment rights. However, violence to our citizens, attacks upon our officers, and destruction of our Nation's resources is unacceptable. Unfortunately, your letter repeats and amplifies a narrative that is harmful to the credibility of our law enforcement personnel and to the rule of law. That is also unacceptable.

The men and women of the U.S. Park Police are public servants charged to protect and serve. They take this charge seriously. I invite you to join me in visiting with our injured officers so you can see and hear, firsthand, their accounts. A similar letter is being sent to Representative Debra Haaland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "David D. Bonmuth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "B".

Secretary of the Interior