

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Mr. Charles F. Sams III
Director, National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20242

Dear Secretary Haaland and Director Sams,

The House Committee on Natural Resources (Committee) is conducting ongoing oversight into the violent and illegal demonstrations that took place on National Park Service land—particularly Columbus Circle and Union Station—in Washington D.C. on Wednesday July 24, 2024. As you are aware, what began as an authorized protest in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s address to a joint session of Congress quickly devolved into mayhem as protestors destroyed and vandalized federal property, assaulted law enforcement officers, burned an effigy of Prime Minister Netanyahu, razed and burned the American Flag, and hoisted foreign and terrorist flags on federal property.¹

On July 23, 2024, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and the National Park Service (NPS) issued a Public Gathering Permit (Permit) to the ANSWER Coalition for their demonstration.² The permit identified Brian Becker as the person in charge, as well as Layan Fuleihan, Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, and Carl Messinio as on-site contacts. As the permittee, the ANSWER Coalition—and the individuals the ANSWER Coalition identified as its event leaders—must be held accountable for violations of the permit’s provisions, all damages to federal property, and the myriad other laws broken during the demonstration.³

The Permit explicitly enumerates mandatory provisions and the consequences for the ANSWER Coalition and its identified event leaders if those provisions are ignored. For example, the Permit

¹ See, e.g., 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/>.

² Public Gathering Permit #24-1278 (on file with the Committee).

³ Illegal activity by the ANSWER Coalition and its acolytes was captured through photographs and videos, which were widely shared and reported on. The ANSWER Coalition’s slogan for the demonstration, “we are the red line,” was one of the many heinous statements painted on federal property.

states that “[i]f the Permittee or its agents . . . cause any damage to park system resources, they may be liable for costs and damages in accordance with the System Unit Resource Protection Act.”⁴ Furthermore, the Permit makes clear that the “Permittee will be responsible for any injury to, loss of, or damage to federally owned or controlled lands, water, or resources (natural or cultural resources or facilities) resulting from Permittee’s activities under the permit, 18 USC § 1361.”⁵ 18 USC § 1361 provides for punishment in the form of both fines and imprisonment. 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 “statute seat, wall, fountain, light poles, elevator towers, or other erection or architectural feature, or any tree, shrub, or landscaping features.”

The ANSWER Coalition and its event leaders were required to manage their demonstrators and ensure compliance. At its core, the Permit required that “[t]he area should be left in substantially the same condition as it was prior to the activities authorized herein.” The ANSWER Coalition violated—and encouraged violation by others of—nearly every Permit provision. Unsurprisingly, demonstrators continued to violate the Permit’s provisions even after the Permit was revoked. In fact, ANSWER Coalition’s violations, including assault on federal officers, destruction of federal property, resisting arrest, and more were so extreme that the United States Park Police (USPP) contacted the Committee to alert them to the ongoing situation⁶. USPP, Capitol Police (USCP), and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) became overwhelmed due to DOI’s inaction and had no choice but to use force in self-defense and to regain control of the demonstrators.

Although all Americans have the right to engage in peaceful protests, violent demonstrations such as the one that took place on July 24, 2024, have no place in our Nation and must be condemned not only by words, but by action. The Permittee, its named event organizers, and the criminal demonstrators must be held liable to the full extent of the law.

Accordingly, the Committee hereby requests that DOI and NPS immediately launch a full investigation of crimes that took place during the July 24 protests and refer charges to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for civil and criminal prosecution, as provided by federal law.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

⁴ Public Gathering Permit #24-1278 (on file with the Committee).

⁵ *Id.*

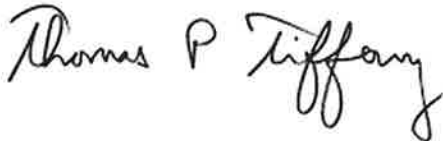
⁶ Personal communications with USPP on file with Committee Staff.



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