



Investigative Report of Questionable Actions Allegedly Taken by NPS Officials During the 2017 Presidential Inauguration

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This is a version of the report prepared for public release.

SYNOPSIS

We initiated this investigation in February 2017 after receiving a complaint concerning questionable actions allegedly taken by National Park Service (NPS) officials and employees during and after the 58th presidential inauguration ceremony held at the National Mall on January 20, 2017. The complainant alleged that an NPS National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA) official instructed NPS employees to alter records related to crowd size estimates for the inauguration. The complainant also believed that NPS public affairs employees released unauthorized information to the press about a January 21, 2017 phone call from President Donald Trump to Acting NPS Director Michael Reynolds, and that one of these employees did not go up the NPS chain of command for the inauguration when responding to a request from Reynolds. Finally, the complainant alleged that while working at the inauguration, a NAMA employee engaged in personal activities—posting to his personal Facebook page—that interfered with the performance of his duties.

We did not find evidence to substantiate any of these allegations. All of the witnesses we interviewed denied that the NAMA official instructed staff to alter reports on the inauguration or to remove crowd size information. We also found no evidence that the public affairs employees released any information to the media about the President's phone call, or that the employee who responded to Reynolds' request was required to go through the chain of command. Regarding the final allegation, the NAMA employee's supervisor and an official who oversaw the employee during the inauguration both said that the employee fulfilled his responsibilities as assigned during the event.

DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

We initiated this investigation on February 10, 2017, based on a complaint alleging that several National Park Service (NPS) officials and employees took questionable actions during and after the 58th presidential inauguration ceremony, held at the National Mall in Washington, DC, on January 20, 2017. Specifically, the complainant alleged the following:

- That an NPS National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA) official instructed NPS employees to alter records related to crowd size estimates for the inauguration ceremony
- That two NPS public affairs employees released information to the press, without authorization, about a January 21, 2017 phone call from President Donald Trump to Acting NPS Director Michael Reynolds
- That one of the public affairs employees circumvented the NPS chain of command for the inauguration when responding to a request from Reynolds (although the complainant did not know what Reynolds requested, we determined that Reynolds asked the public affairs employee to help obtain inauguration photographs after the President requested them during the January 21 phone call)
- That a NAMA employee assigned to the inauguration engaged in personal activities at work that interfered with the performance of his duties

The NAMA Official Did Not Ask Staff to Alter Any Records

On January 21, 2017, the NAMA official allegedly asked staff during a meeting to “scrub” attendance records to remove information about the size of the crowd at the inauguration.

We found no evidence to substantiate the allegation that the NAMA official asked staff to alter crowd size information. The official told us that during this meeting she asked the staff to make sure they did not include crowd size estimates in any reports. She told us that she did not say the word “scrub” during the meeting, and she denied telling the staff to alter any information.

The official told us that she instructed the staff not to include crowd size estimates in the reports because she wanted to make sure that the reports did not contain nonfactual references to crowd size. She explained that the NPS did not have the necessary methodology in place to do an accurate crowd count and, since the Million Man March in 1995, had made it a practice not to collect or provide any crowd size information for events held at the National Mall. She said many of the staff members who were assigned to the inauguration worked permanently in other parks and may have been unfamiliar with this practice.

The official told us she also gave the staff this instruction because the press and the White House had expressed interest in the size of the crowd at the inauguration. She said that she asked a few staff members to review the reports to verify that no reference to crowd size was included. According to the official, the review revealed that no reports contained references to crowd size.

We reviewed U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and NPS policies, including NPS Director's Order 19, "Records Management," and confirmed that the NPS did not have a policy addressing the collection or reporting of crowd size information for events held at the National Mall. We also confirmed that it had been the NPS' practice since the Million Man March not to collect this information.

A number of NPS employees attended the meeting. Of the employees we interviewed, no one recalled the official using the word "scrub" or interpreted her instructions to mean that they should alter records. In addition, the complainant acknowledged having no evidence that anyone altered any records as a result of the official's instructions.

We later spoke to the complainant about the NPS' practice of not collecting crowd size information for events held at the National Mall. We were told that had the complainant understood this practice before the meeting, the official's instruction would not have been a concern.

NPS Public Affairs Employees Did Not Release Information to the Media About the President's Phone Call to Michael Reynolds

While at work on January 21, 2017, several NPS staff members were watching a live White House press conference on television. During the press conference, an NPS public affairs employee allegedly said that he disagreed with, and needed to "refute," statements that White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer made about the inauguration. The complainant could provide no information beyond this initial complaint, but believed that based on the public affairs employee's comments, either that employee or another public affairs employee may have disclosed information to the press about the phone conversation between President Trump and Reynolds.

We found no evidence to substantiate this allegation. Both of the public affairs employees denied disclosing information to the press about the President's phone call to Reynolds. In addition, Reynolds and NPS National Capital Region Director Bob Vogel told us that knowledge of the phone call was widespread throughout the NPS, since the initial call from the White House came in to the U.S. Park Police operations center. Reynolds stated that he did not consider his conversation with the President protected information. He also felt the news articles that reported on the phone call did not contain details that the two public affairs employees would have known.

When we interviewed the public affairs employee who made the comment during the press conference, he explained what he meant by it. The employee said that he had heard Spicer make three statements that the employee believed were inaccurate:

- That the January 2017 inauguration was the first time they had used a white protective cover for the grass at the National Mall
- That the crowd at the inauguration extended from the steps of the Capitol to the Washington Monument

- That more people had witnessed this inauguration than any previous inauguration

The public affairs employee recalled thinking that NPS would need to prepare a response to address Spicer's statements; he explained that based on his experience, he expected the NPS to get questions about them from the media. Soon after the press conference ended, the employee said, NPS prepared a written response to Spicer's statements, which was vetted through the NPS and DOI Offices of Communications, so that public affairs staff would be ready for any media inquiries. We confirmed the employee's account with an NPS communications official.

NPS Responded Appropriately to the President's Request for Inauguration Photographs

Although the complainant did not know the nature of the request the President made to Reynolds during their phone call, the complainant raised concerns in our interview about perceived issues with NPS' response to the request. The complainant believed that the public affairs employee who assisted Reynolds with the request should have gone through the NPS chain of command for the inauguration when responding to the request.

We did not find evidence to substantiate this allegation. We confirmed that the President spoke to Reynolds by phone on January 21 and requested photographs of the inauguration, and that the NPS sent six pictures to the White House. Reynolds told us that immediately after speaking with the President, he asked the public affairs employee and a DOI employee who had photographed the inauguration to coordinate with each other and collect inauguration photos.

The public affairs employee told us that he received photos of the inauguration from an NPS employee who had photographed the event. The NPS employee sent his photos to the public affairs employee, who forwarded them to the White House sometime in the afternoon, several hours after Reynolds first contacted him. The public affairs employee explained that he selected six of the employee's photos and submitted them to NPS leadership to forward to the White House, but later, after learning the White House had not yet received them, he sent four of the photos directly to the White House.

Regarding the DOI employee's photos, the public affairs employee said he saw emails that led him to believe that these photos were sent to the White House through the Office of the Secretary of the Interior.

We interviewed the two employees whose photographs were submitted to the White House, and they described how they chose their photos and to whom they sent them. The NPS employee explained that he selected a number of photos, based on his professional judgment, that concentrated on the area of the National Mall where most of the crowd was standing. The DOI employee told us that upon receiving Reynolds' request, she selected seven photos, based on what she thought were the best angles, and sent them to an employee of the Secretary. The Secretary's employee told us she forwarded two or three of those photos to the White House.

Reynolds and a NAMA official said that this was a special request from the White House and the public affairs employee was not required to work within the chain of command when responding

to it. In addition, an NPS official who oversaw operations at the inauguration told us that he thought he did not need to be notified of Reynolds' request unless it was related to his responsibilities.

The NAMA Employee's Personal Activities During the Inauguration Did Not Interfere with the Performance of His Duties

On January 20, 2017, a NAMA employee allegedly made a political post on Facebook while on duty. The complainant, who had heard about the post but had not seen it, inferred that the post was inappropriate because the NAMA employee had allegedly written it during regular working hours and it was political in nature.

We found no evidence that the NAMA employee engaged in personal activities that interfered with the performance of his duties. We interviewed an NPS employee who had seen the Facebook post, and she told us that she only saw one post—a couple of sentences long—on the NAMA employee's personal Facebook account that day. The NAMA employee's supervisor and the NPS official who oversaw operations at the inauguration both told us that the employee successfully completed his assigned duties and tasks during the inauguration. In addition, the NAMA employee told us he did not use Government equipment to access his personal social media accounts the day of the inauguration.

SUBJECTS

1. NAMA official
2. NAMA employee
3. Two NPS public affairs employees

DISPOSITION

We provided a copy of this report to the Acting NPS Director.