

47 Four Oaks Road
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October 27, 2009

The Honorable Jon Jarvis
Director, National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Jarvis:

First let me congratulate you on your selection and confirmation as the 18th Director of the National Park Service. You must feel excited, challenged, and overwhelmed! And it must be a humbling sensation knowing you are following in the footsteps of so many great people, and knowing that the future of the National Park Service can be so affected by you and your administration.

My wife and I are living our dream. Early in our lives we experienced the thrill and excitement of visiting some of the national parks for the first time; later we had the joy and excitement of visiting the parks with our children as we rushed around on three week vacations trying to stop at every park along the way; and finally we began to talk about retiring early so we could spend more time in the parks; and that is exactly what we are doing! After six years in the ministry, and 27 years as president and CEO of a fairly large manufacturing company, I retired in 2005, and my wife, Sara, and I began working as seasonal park rangers---first at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, and then two years at Mesa Verde National Park. It's been a privilege, it's been a joy, and we love every day!

As employees of the National Park Service, we have seen both the good and the bad. We have seen the overwhelming majority of employees who are still idealistic, ever hopeful, and still burning with visions of our national parks as very special places. I suspect there are many employees of the National Park Service—both past and present—who had tears in their eyes during parts of the recent Ken Burn's series. To be part of the park service--- to be part of a place where so many can say, "Today was the best day of my life!" --- truly is a privilege and an honor.

Unfortunately, as seasonal rangers we also have seen another side of the National Park Service. It's the side where some people have become complacent; they have been less careful about how money is spent, or about how time is used. And it's the side where some people feel they are no longer accountable, where they feel they are immune from oversight and supervision, or where they feel they can ignore the spirit and intent of directives from people like the President, the Secretary of the Interior, or even you, the Director of the National Park Service.

Consequently, I am writing you.

As you know, the President, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Attorney General have all sent us memorandums and directives to make every agency of our government more open and transparent, and to increase the spirit of cooperation between government agencies and those who seek information about the finances and operations of those agencies. This implies not only strict adherence to the Freedom of Information Act, but the implementation of practices and procedures which would prevent the need for formal Freedom of Information Act requests.

Unfortunately, in some of our parks those memorandums and directives have been ignored; the management of some of our parks act as if the Freedom of Information Act was never passed; and the concept that citizens are entitled to peruse the budgets and minutes of public agencies is not accepted or recognized.

Since July 1, 2009, I have been trying to get some very basic financial information about Mesa Verde National Park where my wife and I worked as seasonal rangers during the summers of 2007 and 2009. After numerous letters to Mesa Verde National Park, to the FOIA Officer of the Intermountain Regional Office, and even with the help of the FOIA Officers of DOI and NPS in Washington, D.C., I still have not received any of the information I requested. If you would like to read some or all of these letters, they all are posted on a family web site that I maintain at <http://schundler.net/FOIA.htm>

Openness and transparency in government can and does work. I have a brother who was mayor of Jersey City, New Jersey for nine years; I have another brother who has been the president of his town's school board for years; and I was an elected town council member for seven years and served on the Planning Board of another town for over 15 years. We all were subject to both the Freedom of Information Act and the New Jersey Sunshine Law. These laws mandate that budgets are formulated during public meetings and that each and every line item is open for public scrutiny; it means previous budgets and expenditures are analyzed during open meetings and that projected budgets are developed and eventually voted on in public. The minutes of every meeting are public documents, and members of boards and committees cannot meet without public notice. And when a citizen comes into an administrative office and asks for minutes, budgetary information, and/or almost anything except confidential personnel information or information related to any kind of litigation, the information is forthcoming.

I believe that is the kind of openness and transparency President Obama envisions, and the kind of spirit of cooperation he has suggested in his memorandums and directives.

I'm not suggesting every town in New Jersey conforms to the laws or to the spirit of the laws, but most do. I've seen it work, and some of us continue to work to make open and transparent government the norm in every town and in every agency. And during each and every year there has been progress.

As you can see from reading my letters, my experiences with Mesa Verde National Park have been far from experiences of openness and transparency. The standard response to any question about the park's expenditures was simply, "We don't give out that information." And several months later, I am still getting that response. And unfortunately, the Intermountain Regional FOIA Office seems to have been working more as a protector of the bureaucracy than as an advocate for openness and transparency.

Consequently I am writing you in the hope that you can work to make everyone in the National Park Service live up to and attain the goals and objectives inherent in those memorandums and directives we all received. I am writing in the hope that you can set a new standard for the parks, and that you can start the process of making the administration and budgetary process of every park open and transparent. I am writing in the hope that this can become one of your new priorities.

Good luck, best wishes in everything you do, and please let me know if I can help in any way!

Looking ahead,

Bruce E. Schundler

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