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Whistleblower to be honored with community heroes
Stephanie Antonian Rutherford
The Enquirer

In the past year, the name Bunnatine Greenhouse has been synonymous with "whistleblower." In 2005, Greenhouse, a former senior contracting official of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, made headlines when she testified against Halliburton.

Greenhouse is in Battle Creek this week, where she will speak at a "Community Heroes Mixer," at McCamly Plaza at 5 p.m. today. The event will honor Greenhouse, along with local community heroes.

On June 27, 2005, Greenhouse testified before a Democratic Party public committee, alleging specific instances of fraud, waste and other irregularities by Halliburton — one of the world's largest providers of oil and gas services — in regard to its operations in Iraq.

During the testimony, Greenhouse described one of Halliburton's no-bid contracts awarded to Kellogg, Brown and Root — a subsidiary of Halliburton — as "the most blatant and improper contract abuse I have witnessed during the course of my professional career." Greenhouse refused to sign her approval on the contract.

Greenhouse was hired to her post by Lt. Gen. Joe Ballard in 1997 to oversee contracts at the Army Corps of Engineers. Greenhouse's lawyer, Michael Kohn, alleges that after Ballard's retirement in 2000, Greenhouse's performance reviews, which had been exemplary during her entire career, became negative.

In August, she was demoted in what Kohn called an "obvious reprisal" for her revelations about the Halliburton contracts. Greenhouse is currently on leave from her position and in the beginning phases of legal action against the federal government. On Thursday, Greenhouse spoke candidly to the Enquirer, as a private citizen, about her demotion and removal from her high-ranking post.

Why did you choose to share your story in Battle Creek?

Greenhouse: It was tremendous to have people that are far away from the United States capital understand the gravity of what was happening to me. To understand the choices and the sacrifices that I had to make in my decision to do the right thing. It is important because I am living in an atmosphere of fear and humiliation and being scorned simply for standing up for what I believe in.

You said that you were offered a chance to retire with a clean record after questioning the Halliburton contracts. You did not and then were demoted.

Greenhouse: I could not simply sign my name to a contract that was so exclusionary of other contractors. I could not sign something that was so grossly wrong. What the federal government tells us to do in contracting is that everything must be done with the highest degree of integrity. It must be beyond reproach and not show favoritism. This contract did not fit the criteria.

I was not going to let my career go down the tube. I have given every fiber of my being for 23

years, and I am simply not going to let that happen.

What are the dangers of eliminating competition in national defense contracts?

Greenhouse: We all know that our system is based on competition. Competition always causes a sharpening of the teeth and lets contractors know that you have to give us your best or you may not be the winner. Those are the rules of engagement. During senate testimony, a KBR employee testified that soldiers were given food that was over a year expired.

It has been said that you were attacking Halliburton (formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney) because of partisan views.

Greenhouse: Politics never entered in any of my decision process. I never targeted Halliburton. When paperwork comes before me and I do not see that it is in accordance to what federal law dictates, whether it is "XYZ" company, I don't care. In this case it was Halliburton. I never looked toward any political affiliations. I highlighted the things that needed to be looked at and that was that.

After being demoted (you say without merit) after 23 years of service, do you feel jaded?

Greenhouse: No, I feel charged. Leadership is all about responsibility and making a difference, not just trying to go along just to get along. You take an oath of office, especially in contracting, to say that you are going to protect the public. In my position, the commanders had said that I was too powerful. As a black female I was one of the most powerful people in the Corps. Was I ousted, removed from my job and taken from my career field because I had done some impropriety? No. Every fiscal year I was lauded by commanders. So why was I punished for doing my job? That's a question I can't answer.

You said your job was your passion. What gets you through this?

Greenhouse: I am from Louisiana and within 19 hours of my removal, Hurricane Katrina hit and the levees that the Corps engineers were responsible for broke. Can't you imagine how much that pained me to be taken from my job during this time?

But I don't see life as problems. I see problems as opportunities to make a difference. I learned very early in life to appreciate my adversaries, because when a door is shut in your face it makes you look for the cracks. I look for some glimmer of light that I can go through to save my integrity. I am Bunny Greenhouse first. They can take away my title, but they can't take away who I am. God brought me here for a reason and I face each day with a confidence that if I do the right things, for the right reason, then all will be well.

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