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FBI interviews Halliburton whistleblower

Authorities ask officer questions about higher officials

AP Associated Press
updated 4:52 am ET, Thursday, Nov. 25, 2004

WASHINGTON - An Army whistleblower who raised concerns that the Pentagon improperly awarded business to Vice President Dick Cheney's former company has been interviewed extensively by the FBI and is gathering documents to help agents.

Army Corps of Engineers contract officer Bunnatine Greenhouse, whose allegations about the oil services company Halliburton surfaced in the final weeks of the presidential campaign, was interviewed for a full day last week by the FBI and Army criminal investigators, her lawyer said Wednesday.

"They questioned her about all of her concerns, and they asked questions regarding potential involvement of people at higher-level positions," attorney Michael Kohn said in an interview.

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The Associated Press reported last month that the FBI had expanded a criminal probe into allegations Halliburton overcharged the [government](#) for fuel, adding questions about whether the Bush administration improperly awarded business in Iraq and the Balkans to Halliburton without bidding.

Wrongdoing denied

Both the company and the administration deny any wrongdoing. Cheney's office has said he has had nothing to do with the government contracts that have gone to the company, which he headed in the 1990s until joining President Bush on the 2000 Republican ticket.

In a related development, the inspector general reviewing the spending of U.S. [funds](#) in Iraq is recommending the Army consider withholding 15 percent of Halliburton's money on future contracts to address allegations

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the company has not documented all of the work it has been paid for in the past.

Halliburton spokeswoman Cathy Gist said Wednesday night the company was aware of discussions about a 15 percent withholding but had not been formally told of any plan to implement it. "We will continue to work directly with our client regarding resolution for this issue," she said.

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Army officials did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

Greenhouse has alleged that she began raising questions to her superiors about why the Pentagon was allowing business to go to Halliburton's KBR subsidiary without competitive bidding. She contends she then was frozen out from decisions when she pressed her concerns.

Halliburton's relationship with the administration — along with allegations of possible favoritism — was turned into a campaign issue by Democrats. Her allegations last month caught the attention of the FBI.

Kohn said FBI agents interviewed his client for more than eight hours on Nov. 17. They asked questions about who in the Pentagon might have applied pressure to get business to Halliburton, he said.

Kohn declined to identify any of the higher officials that were discussed during the interview, but said no White House officials came up.

A legal source familiar with the interview, speaking to The AP only on condition of anonymity, said Greenhouse provided the FBI with new information about intervention on one of the Halliburton matters by a senior defense official. The source declined to be more specific, saying the lead was being pursued by investigators.

Kohn said his client was continuing to cooperate. Greenhouse "has been requested and is in the process of providing additional documentation to both the bureau and the criminal investigation division of the Army," he said.


Problems uncovered

Pentagon auditors and congressional Democrats have repeatedly turned up problems with Halliburton's contracts. Among the examples cited are:

- the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait intervened to ensure that Halliburton retained a favored Kuwaiti subcontractor for gasoline imports to Iraq. Administration officials have said only career contracting officials made decisions on Halliburton contracts.
- in 2002, Cheney's chief of staff, a political appointee, was told the vice president's former company would receive no-bid work to restore Iraq's oil facilities. Cheney's spokesman said the information was not given to the vice president.
- Halliburton charged the government \$2.68 a gallon to import Kuwaiti gasoline to Iraq; a U.S. [government agency](#) did the same job for \$1.57 a gallon.
- Pentagon auditors recommended withholding nearly \$160 million in payments, saying Halliburton charged the military for meals in and around Iraq that never were served.

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