

Lawsuit Blazes Trail for FBI Whistleblowers

Last Edited: Tuesday, 06 Feb 2007, 11:00 PM CST

Created: CST

MINNEAPOLISMINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- A jury awarded \$565,000 in damages on Monday to a former FBI agent, agreeing that Jane Turner's superiors retaliated against her for filing a sex-discrimination complaint against her supervisor. "Today is a true vindication for whistleblowers in the FBI," Turner said after the jury returned its verdict in federal court. Turner retired in 2003, amid the pressure of both her discrimination case and a separate dispute that arose after she accused colleagues of stealing a Tiffany crystal globe from the World Trade Center ruins. The jury awarded her \$60,000 in damages for lost wages and \$505,000 for emotional distress. One of her attorneys, Robert Hill, said the judge will have to reduce the \$505,000 to \$300,000 because of a statutory cap on nonmonetary damages, so she'll get \$360,000. Still, Hill said, it's believed to be the largest jury verdict for retaliation in the history of the FBI.

Members of the six-woman, four-man jury expressed strong admiration for Turner afterward. Several gathered around and embraced her. Some had tears in their eyes. "I just want to tell you I have nothing but the utmost respect for you," juror Renee Anderle said.

Deliberations took a half-day Thursday, all day Friday and half the day Monday.

Turner's jury consultant, Nikki Carlson, said it was clear that the jury didn't buy the government's defense, which attacked Turner's credibility and job performance. She said one juror told her that the two jurors seated either side of her wrote "LIAR" on their notepads and stopped taking notes when one of Turner's superiors was testifying. Spokespeople for the FBI and U.S. attorney's office did not immediately return phone calls seeking comment.

Over her 25-year FBI career, Turner was credited with solving some horrifying child-sex abuse and murder cases on North Dakota Indian reservations. She also helped capture Christopher Boyce, a Soviet spy portrayed in the 1985 movie "The Falcon and the Snowman." Records show Turner was rated superior or exceptional in her job reviews until she filed a sex discrimination complaint against her supervisor, Craig Welken.

Turner said Monday that her initial Equal Employment Opportunity complaint was relatively minor. She recalled that it alleged female agents in the FBI's Minneapolis division, which covers Minnesota and the Dakotas, were being given lower ratings than male agents, and that she herself was not getting equal respect, among other things. That case was separate from one still pending before the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General. She noticed a Tiffany globe paperweight on a secretary's desk in the Minneapolis FBI office and, after learning it came from Ground Zero, reported it to the inspector general. The FBI then began moves to fire her. That case had been on hold pending a resolution of this case, Turner said, and she hopes the inspector general takes note that her jury didn't believe the government's claims. Turner said the FBI's treatment of her had had a "chilling effect" on other agents, and that she'd received several congratulatory calls Monday from

current FBI employees, after eight years of getting little support from her colleagues. "I guess they maybe had a sense that it was OK to poke their heads up and say they did support me," she said.