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## A bittersweet win for a federal whistleblower

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Bunnatine “Bunny” [Greenhouse’s long fight](#) with Uncle Sam is over.

Greenhouse, a federal whistleblower who was demoted after exposing problems with a U.S. government contractor in Iraq, has won an almost \$1 million settlement.

The U.S. District Court in Washington on Monday approved awarding Greenhouse \$970,000 in full restitution of lost wages, compensatory damages and attorney fees, said her attorney, Michael D. Kohn.

Beyond the particulars of her situation, Greenhouse said her case makes it “loud and clear that federal employees need better laws” to protect them if they engage in whistleblowing.

The Greenhouse settlement with the Army Corps of Engineers closes a high profile case that involved a Halliburton subsidiary, Kellogg Brown and Root. The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

Greenhouse, who was the civilian procurement executive for the agency, objected to KBR using its own cost projections for a multi-year no-bid, no competition contract.

She initially objected within the Corps and later spoke to Congress about the contract. After she complained to Congress, she said she was kicked out of the Senior Executive Service (SES) and stripped of her top secret clearance.

Greenhouse, a strong advocate for [greater protections](#) to aid federal whistleblowers, said her case demonstrates the need for legislation that would provide that.

“I hope that the plight I suffered prompts the administration and Congress to move dedicated civil servants from second-class citizenry and to finally give federal employees the legal rights that they need to protect the legal trust,” Greenhouse said in a statement.



Legislation that would enhance whistleblowing protections has been considered by Congress for years without ever gaining final approval.

Kohn, president of the National Whistleblowers Center, called Greenhouse “an American hero.”

“She had the courage to stand alone and challenge powerful special interests,” he said in the statement released by his office. “She exposed a corrupt contracting environment where casual and clubby contracting practices were the norm. Her courage led to sweeping legal reforms that will forever halt the gross abuse she had the courage to expose.”

During an interview with the Federal Diary, Greenhouse said her working conditions had deteriorated to the point that someone rigged a trip cord in her office last year, causing her to fall and have a “very painful, very sore” injury to her knee.

With the settlement, Greenhouse said she was happy to get on with her life but also sad that she did not complete her federal career as she had planned. After 29 years with the federal government, she retired Friday, a few years earlier than she originally thought she would and without her SES status and top secret clearance.

“No settlement is going to make me whole,” she said.

### **Workers’ comp proposals**

Benefit programs for federal employees are under a microscope. Workers’ compensation for injured employees is one that may get the scalpel.

At a Senate hearing Tuesday, the Obama administration offered proposals that its says would improve workers’ comp, but federal employee organizations beg to differ.

“This critical program has not been significantly updated in almost 40 years, and I think it deserves a closer look,” said Sen. Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), chairman of his chamber’s subcommittee on the federal workforce.

Christine M. Griffin, who will soon leave her position as deputy director of the Office of Personnel Management, told the panel that injured employees reaching retirement age can choose less expensive retirement benefits but that “there is little incentive to do so because the workers’ compensation benefits far exceed those benefits available under employees’ retirement plans.”

The administration wants to bring the benefits in line with each other.

Gary Steinberg is acting director of the Labor Department’s Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs, which administers the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act. He proposed establishing a 70 percent benefit level for all recipients. Currently, employees with dependents get 75 percent of their pay; those without dependents get 66.7 percent. The 75 percent level often exceeds the employee’s take-home pay before an injury, which Steinberg says is a big disincentive to returning to work.

Joseph A. Beaudoin, president of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association,

said the Labor plan “short changes FECA recipients.” The plan, he added, fails to account for FECA disadvantages, including the inability of injured employees to increase their salaries through raises and promotions.

Ron Watson, representing the National Association of Letter Carriers, said the real problem “is that hundreds, even thousands, of injured workers who are able, willing and eager to return to work are not being allowed to do so.”

U.S. Postal Service policy, he said, prevents many injured workers from doing limited-duty jobs even though they are able to perform those tasks and want to do them.

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