

Jury awards former Hanford worker \$8 million

Forced to resign from contractor

By ANNETTE CARY
Tri-City Herald

KENNEWICK, Wash. — A Benton County Superior Court jury awarded \$8.1 million Tuesday to a former Hanford manager for retaliation and discrimination.

Julie Atwood was forced to resign from U.S. Department of Energy contractor Mission Support Alliance in 2013.

She filed a civil lawsuit against the contractor and one of its vice presidents, Steve Young, who also is the mayor of Kennewick.

The jury found that Mission Support Alliance retaliated and discriminated against Atwood, and that Young aided and abetted.

The verdict includes \$2.1 million in lost wages and benefits, covering both past and potential future wages. The remaining \$6 million is for emotional harm.

The jury reached the verdict after deliberating less than a day, following nearly three weeks of testimony.

Atwood's attorney, Jack Sheridan of Seattle, sought damages only from Mission Support Alliance and not Young.

Mission Support Alliance had no comment. Young could not be reached.

Denise Ashbaugh, a Seattle attorney representing Mission Support Alliance and Young, argued during the trial that the company had good reason to want Atwood off its payroll.

Atwood was accused of creating a hostile work envi-



AP Photo

A former Hanford worker who was forced to resign has won a lawsuit over retaliation.

ronment, abusing her relationship with an influential Department of Energy official and timecard fraud.

But if that was the case, she would have been fired earlier or at least received counseling or progressive discipline, countered Sheridan during closing arguments on Monday. The timing of her forced resignation showed it was really to protect Young, he said.

Similar complaints

Similar complaints were filed against Atwood in 2012 and 2013, Sheridan said. She was cleared both times, but was forced to resign anyway after a short investigation into the 2013 complaint, he said.

Atwood told investigators interviewing her after the 2013 complaint that they should be looking at Young, not her, Sheridan said.

She believed her comments were confidential when she told investigators that Young was conducting city of Kennewick business during hours he was supposed to be working for the Hanford contractor and was being paid with taxpayer money.

Sheridan claimed that Mission Support Alliance leaders were told of her comments about Young.

Three days later Atwood was told she was being fired, but she resigned in an attempt to protect her reputation and pension, Sheridan said.

She left the building distraught and in tears, pushing a wheelchair holding her personal belongings because no handcart was available. She was humiliated, Sheridan said.

Atwood developed an ongoing mental illness, with symptoms like those of post traumatic stress disorder, he said. She has not worked since.

Atwood received no written information about why she was targeted for termination, Sheridan said.

But in 2014 Mission Support Alliance prepared a record of events on the 2013 investigation, indicating she was cleared. A few weeks later another record of events was prepared that included additional information, saying she was cleared but adding criticism of Atwood, Sheridan said.

It was an "open secret" that Young did mayor work on a

Department of Energy computer at his DOE office during Hanford work hours, Sheridan said. Support staff kept his city schedule on his federal computer, Sheridan said.

Young also relied on his federal staff for city tasks, such as delivering flowers to city employees on a day to honor administrative support specialists, Sheridan told jurors.

Using government resources, including time and equipment, for nonfederal uses is a violation of the False Claims Act, Sheridan said.

Mission Support Alliance had incentive to protect Young, by getting rid of Atwood, Sheridan argued.

Young played a valuable role for Mission Support Alliance and the Department of Energy because he also was mayor, Sheridan said. As mayor he could lobby Congress for more money for Hanford, which is good for both the Kennewick economy and Hanford contractors, Sheridan said.

Hires contractors

The Department of Energy hires contractors, like Mission Support Alliance, to do the environmental cleanup work at the Hanford nuclear reservation, which produced weapons-program plutonium through the Cold War. Mission Support Alliance is responsible for support services across the site.

The plan to fire Atwood was in contrast with how men at Mission Support Alliance were disciplined, Sheridan told jurors.

One male high-level official inappropriately touched the wife of one of the com-

pany's truck drivers at a company event. The driver had to tell him to stop touching, texting and talking to his wife, but the official was not fired, Sheridan said in court.

In a second incident, a male worker who made derogatory comments about the company, affecting the relationship between the Department of Energy and Mission Support Alliance, was suspended for two weeks rather than be fired. And in a third case a male manager took his staff out to dinner, billing overtime and using a company car. He was suspended two weeks rather than fired, Sheridan said.

Sheridan said Mission Support Alliance changed when Pasco native Frank Armijo was named president in 2010, serving until 2015. The top management shifted from a mix of men and women to almost all men, many of whom were old friends of Armijo, Sheridan argued.

Ashbaugh, the defense attorney, told jurors that Atwood acted as though rules did not apply to her like they did to her co-workers and others.

She "cozied up" to powerful men at the Department of Energy, using that as protection when she did not follow the rules or failed to meet the expectations of Young, to whom she reported, Ashbaugh said.

"She simply did not perform her job very well," Ashbaugh argued.

Atwood came to work late and then would be missing from her desk during the day, Ashbaugh said.

Atwood's attorney said her job duties took her out of the office frequently and that she

also had permission to work from home.

The second complaint against her was filed shortly after she returned from a last-minute vacation to Malaysia.

Sheridan said Atwood gave appropriate notice, discussing a possible trip a month before leaving, but defense attorneys claimed the first notice she gave was a text from the airport to a co-worker.

Made up the time

Atwood accused Young of timecard fraud only to deflect attention from herself, Ashbaugh said.

A check of Young's work showed that he was putting in more than 40 hours a week for Mission Support Alliance, Ashbaugh said. When Young had mayoral duties during the work day, he made up the time after hours, she said.

Young was named in the lawsuit only to increase media coverage, the defense attorney argued.

Losing your job is difficult, but Atwood "made it into an event it was not," Ashbaugh said. She has only applied for a dozen jobs in the four years since she left Mission Support Alliance, Ashbaugh said.

Atwood's attorney asked for \$2.1 million in lost wages, saying Atwood, who is now 62, would have worked until she was 70 and then become a consultant. He also asked for at least \$4 million to \$8 million for emotional harm.

Ashbaugh had argued if the jury did not rule in their favor, all Atwood should be owed is about \$71,000, or pay for six months, which would cover the time she might have needed to find another job, she said.

University of Oregon spends heavily on new recruiting drive

By SAUL HUBBARD
The Register-Guard

EUGENE — After five straight years of seeing its undergraduate enrollment shrink, the University of Oregon is spending heavily on an ambitious new recruitment drive.

University leaders hope to expand the undergraduate student body by as many as 3,000 during the next eight years, from a projected 19,000 this fall to more than 22,000 in 2025.

Those added students will have one thing in common: They'll all come from out of state, according to the UO administration's financial projections.

The UO already has hired five new full-time high-school-student recruiters who will be based in other states, in addition to two existing recruiter positions. This academic year, the school also will increase its recruiting "presence" — typically meaning visits by UO staffers — in as many as 20 other states in the West, Midwest, South and on the East Coast. In total, the school's annual admissions budget has been upped by \$1.3 million, or almost 30 percent. Some of those extra dollars will go to in-state recruiting efforts.

The UO's push to recruit more nonresident and international students isn't new

or unique. The UO and other public universities across the country have been enrolling more and more of them for more than a decade — a practice that at times has drawn criticism.

The UO's goal is largely financial: Out-of-state students pay much higher tuition in an era when taxpayer support for Oregon public universities has sagged. This school year, a full-time nonresident student will pay \$34,611 in tuition at the UO, compared with \$11,571 for an Oregonian. Adding the projected 3,000 nonresident students by 2025 could boost the UO's annual tuition revenue by \$100 million at current rates.

Snagging high-achieving high schoolers from other states can also help boost a university's academic prestige.

In the past decade, the UO's nonresident undergraduate population has doubled,

from 4,600 in the 2007-08 school year to 9,249 in 2016-17, going up almost every year. In the decade before that, the UO had kept that population flat, between 3,700 and 4,200 students.

From 2007 to 2016, Ore-

gon State University and Portland State University also rapidly drew in more out-of-staters: OSU's out-of-state undergraduate population jumped from 2,302 to 9,055, while PSU's went from 10,829 to 15,060.

THE ULTIMATE FLEETWOOD MAC
RUMOURS
TRIBUTE SHOW

General Admission \$25
Seniors and Active Military \$20

Show starts at 7 p.m.
Doors open at 6

Saturday October 14th
Liberty Theatre

Tickets on sale August 14th at the Liberty Theatre Box Office and online at <http://libertyastoria.showare.com/rumours>

Nu-Way Carpet

BREW 22 COFFEE

Soar With Us

SMOKE N' VAPE BLOC

Mobil



Celebrating Hope

CMH-OHSU Knight Cancer Collaborative

The CMH-OHSU Knight Cancer Collaborative has been built with extraordinary support from our community. The center has been designed to serve the entire region with expanded capacity and the most state-of-the-art technology found anywhere on the Pacific Coast. It's truly been a journey of hope—for CMH caregivers, the community, donors, and patients who will no longer have to travel to receive radiation treatment.

Join Columbia Memorial Hospital in celebrating this achievement at a Community Open House.

Saturday, October 14, 2017 | 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 15, 2017 | 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

1905 Exchange Street
Astoria, OR 97103



KNIGHT
CANCER
Institute

Medical Excellence without the Miles

503-338-4085 | columbiamemorial.org/cancer-care

