

# LASHING OUT

## Former EPA chief Anne Burford rips administration, denies wrongdoing

□ EDITOR'S NOTE: UPI investigative reporter Gregory Gordon won the Raymond Clapper Memorial award for his coverage of the 1983 EPA controversy — including revelations of allegations against agency chief Anne Burford. Last week, he interviewed Burford about her new book on her troubled EPA reign. □

By GREGORY GORDON  
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WASHINGTON — Former EPA chief Anne Burford has broken her silence about her days in office in a burst of anger against the White House, the press, House investigators and ex-aide Rita Lavelle, who she says should “buy a black wig . . . and move to Alaska.”

In an interview promoting her new book, Burford put little blame on herself for the Environmental Protection Agency controversy that led to her 1983 resignation and drove 21 of her senior staff members from their posts.

Burford depicted herself as a victim of the administration's insistence on withholding EPA files from Congress through a presidential “executive privilege” claim — a battle that resulted in her being cited for contempt of Congress. The House Judiciary Committee adopted a report Thursday agreeing with Burford's contention that Justice Department officials



ANN BURFORD  
... running EPA 'was fun'

forced her to keep the files from Congress.

But Burford brushed aside questions about contradictions between her book and her sworn testimony to Congress and scoffed at a separate House subcommittee's finding that she “violated the public trust” by stalling two toxic waste cleanups.

“What happened to me, and to the people who worked so hard for me, was scandalous,” Burford concludes in the book, “Are You Tough

Enough?” But at the same time the book skims over most of the allegations of agency wrongdoing, which Burford termed groundless.

She called Jim Sanderson, a central figure in the controversy, “a great guy” who has done “a great public service.” Sanderson, who was Burford's close consultant, was investigated by the FBI because of allegations he attended agency meetings about policies affecting his private industry legal clients. A grand jury found insufficient evidence to indict him on conflict of interest charges.

In an interview last week, Burford labeled the congressional report criticizing some of her other actions a “piece of junk,” said the news media resorted to “underhanded tactics” to attack agency officials and accused White House aides of “moral cowardice” for asking Colorado campaign supporter Joe Coors to request her resignation.

Of Lavelle, the only EPA official to be convicted of a crime in the scandal over agency handling of toxic waste cleanups and policies, Burford said, “Rita's biggest problem is that she's not very bright. And the woman has problems with telling the truth.”

In her book, Burford describes Lavelle, who recently completed a six-month prison term for her perjury conviction, as a blowsy, “overweight . . . unnatural

blonde” who was forced on the EPA by the White House. She said she fired Lavelle in a tearful confrontation on Feb. 4, 1983, for lying to her about a damaging memo.

“I really feel sorry for her,” Burford said in the interview. “She should buy a black wig, change her name and move to Alaska.”

Burford, who said Lavelle's handling of the Superfund program was “one factor” in her undoing as EPA administrator, said she “can only guess” about whether Lavelle was taking directions from the White House. “But 100 phone calls from (White House aide) Craig Fuller certainly are suggestive that, yes, indeed, something was going on.”

Burford said she believes it was the office of presidential aide Michael Deaver that directed Lavelle, a former public relations specialist at Aerojet-General Corp., be placed at the EPA.

Burford's book quotes liberally from an investigative report by the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee, chaired by Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., who spearheaded the EPA investigation.

But she never mentions key passages concluding she “violated the public trust” by delaying for more than a year release of \$8 million in Superfund money for cleanup of two major toxic waste sites in California and Minnesota.

Calling the report “a piece of

junk” and “a political product,” Burford said, “Dingell spent so much time investigating all this garbage, he had to come out with something. If you read that report you will find it is the most mealy-mouthed report and what it ends up finding is, ‘There was mismanagement.’”

On other subjects, Burford said:

■ Her appearance before a federal grand jury in 1983 was “frightening” because of “the collective IQ in the grand jury room — it's not very high, and these issues were complicated.” She said she felt the Justice Department, which supported the executive privilege claim, was trying its “damndest” because “the only way they could come out looking good on this thing is if they found me guilty of something.”

■ She does not recall a meeting with Sanderson on Jan. 20, 1983 — months after he left the EPA — in which they discussed the desire of his client, Chemical Waste Management, Inc., to secure a special operating permit for its ocean incineration ship. Burford acknowledged in 1983 that the meeting occurred shortly before a top aide reversed EPA staff and ordered prompt processing of a permit.

■ Running EPA was “fun,” even during the darkest days, but she would never accept public office again. “I've given at the office, so to speak,” she said.