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New White House counsel praised by her fellow Enron prosecutors, defense attorneys alike

Posted on June 3, 2011 | By Richard Dunham

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This post was based on reporting by the Houston Chronicle's Tom Fowler. Kathy Ruemmler, the former Enron prosecutor **tapped Thursday to serve as White House Counsel**, won praise from her former Justice Department colleagues and Enron defense attorneys alike.



Kathy Ruemmler replaces Bob Bauer as White House Counsel. (White House photo)

Philip Hilder, a Houston defense attorney who represented a number of former Enron workers who were witnesses, praised Ruemmler's work as prosecutor in cases involving former Enron CEOs Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling.

"She has a profound sense of justice and doesn't see her role as one to win at all costs," Hilder said. "She was deliberate and thoughtful in her actions, not one who would shoot from the hip."

While some Enron prosecutors drew the ire of the defense bar, Ruemmler, now 40, was consistently reasonable to work with, Hilder said.

"There were a number of people at Enron that got swept up in the scandal who maybe made bad judgments but did not do anything criminal. Ruemmler understood the difference," Hilder said.

Ruemmler also earned the respect of many in the defense bar, something not every Enron prosecutor could say. Bill Rosch, a defense attorney who represented Enron executives in earlier cases, said he became friends with the prosecutor during the trials. Ruemmler stayed in Houston to work through the 2005 Christmas holiday in preparation for Lay's and Skilling's

trials, so Rosch invited her to spend the holiday with his family. "She really digs into a problem, but will consult easily and listens well," Rosch said. "But she's a decision maker, too."

Dan Cogdell, a Houston attorney who managed to get one of the only acquittals for an Enron defendant when he represented Sheila Kahanek, also praised Ruemmler.

"She was an effective advocate in the Enron cases and, generally speaking, she was a zealous but appropriate advocate," Cogdell said "If she stays true to her internal course, she will be an invaluable counsel to the president."

Andrew Weissmann, the second head of the Enron Task Force and now an attorney with Jenner & Block, called Ruemmler "a superstar."

"We should all be very grateful to have her working for the public," Weissmann said. "On a personal level I could not be prouder."

Ruemmler spent six years as a federal prosecutor, with the Enron case being her most prominent assignment. She received the Attorney General's Award for Exceptional Service for her Enron work.

In a post-trial interview with the Chronicle, Ruemmler described the many years she and other prosecutors spent building cases in the wide-ranging legal drama.

"It was like going to a foreign country and learning a new language, like being immersed in that world," said Ruemmler. "And it was a different world."

Mary Flood, a former Houston Chronicle reporter who covered the prosecution of Enron and its executives, said Ruemmler stood out as a prosecutor in that she had an unusual "defense attorney-like conscience."

"Her concern for fairness and justice and for the defendants not getting too long a sentence was incredibly unusual to me as reporter who has talked to prosecutors for three decades," said Flood, who now works for Androvett Legal Media.

Flood, who has since become friends with Ruemmler, said she also stood out as the only attorney in the courtroom wearing heels day-in and day-out.

"She could fight with the best of the men and dressed like the best of the women outside the courtroom," Flood said.

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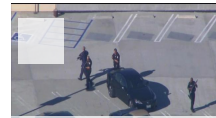
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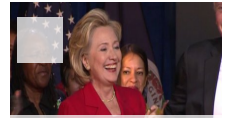
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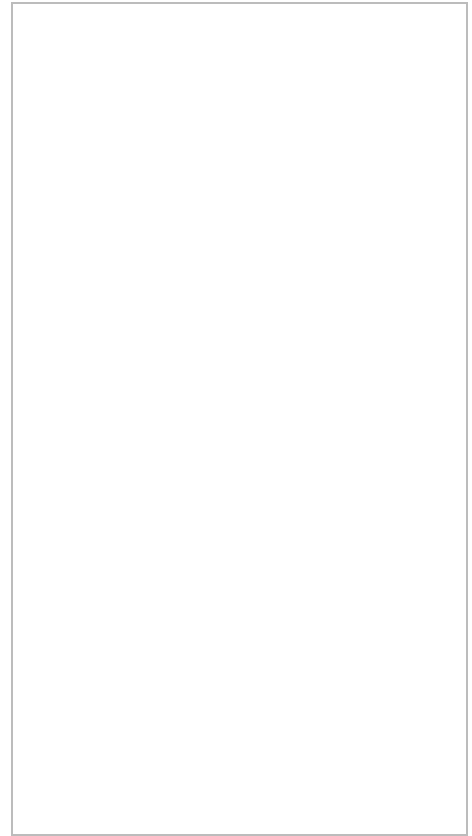


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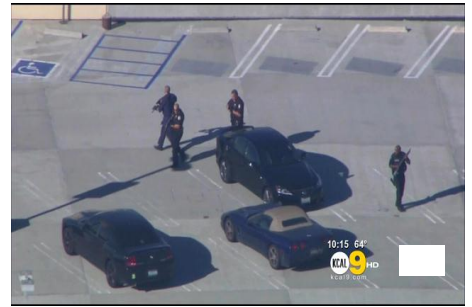
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