Our community is better off for Glynn County and 120 families having received $50 million in damages from Honeywell, the owners of the LCP Chemicals Superfund Site. It took a long time for our community to change from the message that “our environment was expendable for jobs” to “our community will not be your dumping ground for toxic waste,” and the suit sent this message clearly. The GEC likes to think we have been a driving force in making this change.

Evidently, someone thought we had something to do with the change.

As the suit moved forward, the GEC increasingly felt like the dog outside the Courthouse door that got kicked whenever something went in favor of the plaintiffs. This was very evident when the Seafood Consumption Advisory Brochure we developed was entered in as evidence. The GEC produced the Seafood Consumption Advisory with an EPA Environmental Justice (EJ) Grant, in cooperation with the Coastal Resources Division, local and state Health Department, Georgia Environmental Protection Division, and solicited input from toxicologists. Still, the GEC caught the blame for being audacious enough to produce an advisory about the most significant health threat to our community.

The day the Seafood Consumption Advisory Brochure was entered into the Court, the GEC learned about it when a call was received requesting documentation about how we developed the brochure and proof that we did, in fact, have it reviewed and approved by the Georgia toxicologist that issued seafood advisories. The request expanded to detailed documentation of the process we used to develop the Brochure.

Just three days after the Seafood Consumption Advisory Brochure was entered into Court, the GEC received a call from the EPA requesting a Quality Assurance Project Plan, commonly shortened to QAPP. The GEC had produced a QAPP before the project started, as was required under the grant. But this was just three days before the official end of the project, and it was no ordinary QAPP the EPA was requesting. The EPA wanted a QAPP like a University would do for a major health study, or the 5000 page variety. The power of major corporations to pull political strings and manipulate federal agencies was fully evident.

Signs of political pressure were evident from EPA documents we later obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. When our Seafood Advisory was submitted to the EPA for comment, none came back. We only learned about their displeasure, or horror, to be more accurate, when we later obtained internal EPA communications. EPA Superfund staff were adamant that the GEC should not be allowed to do the Seafood Advisory. Why would the EPA Superfund staff not want us to warn our community about the seafood contaminated by these Superfund Sites? After all, it was another EPA branch that saw our seafood contamination as a significant environmental justice issue. Of the 30 proposals submitted, the EPA EJ staff selected the GEC’s as one of only three to be implemented.

Being an advocate for a clean environment and healthy economy for citizens of coastal Georgia should not be controversial or politicized. Unfortunately, in the current political climate, corporations can and do use their powerful political connections to smite those working for a clean and healthy place to live and raise their families.
The GEC has experienced the power of corporations being wielded against us through State and Federal Agencies in the past, and undoubtedly it will happen in the future if we continue to work in the interest of our community, our children, and generations to come.