

Two Oklahomans force new probe of bombing

OKLAHOMA CITY — With Timothy McVeigh awaiting execution and Terry Nichols facing federal trial, a grand jury opens a new investigation of the Oklahoma City bombing today, prompted by two men's profound distrust for the official explanation of the blast.

The men, one of them the grandfather of two bombing victims, collected 13,500 signatures to empanel the grand jury. In doing so, they ignored the objections of Oklahoma's attorney general and Oklahoma County's district attorney, who has already promised state murder trials for McVeigh and Nichols.

"The verdict will be that, yes, there were other people with McVeigh in Oklahoma City that committed the bombing," a confident State Rep. Charles Key predicts.

Key and Glenn Wilburn, an Oklahoma City accountant who lost



McVeigh

Nichols

grandsons Chase and Colton Smith in the blast, say they were motivated by two basic beliefs: that a larger conspiracy was behind the bombing and that federal agents had prior knowledge of the attack.

Although the federal indictment against McVeigh and Nichols alleged they plotted the bombing with "others unknown," federal authorities now doubt a larger conspiracy. And they vehemently deny any prior knowledge.

District Attorney Bob Macy has

an agreement with federal authorities to file murder charges against McVeigh and Nichols at the end of the Nichols trial, scheduled to begin Sept. 29. Macy does not need a grand jury to bring charges, and he opposed the petition.

Diplomatically, he now says he hopes the 12-member panel will "find out what the truth was in the Oklahoma City bombing. If there is any additional evidence." But then he adds: "I'm unaware of any (such) evidence at this time."

Attorney General Drew Edmondson is more vocal, criticizing the grand jury investigation as a waste of time and taxpayer money.

"The notion that it can learn something that the FBI was unable to learn, is, I think, ludicrous," Edmondson says. "The witnesses that Mr. Key is talking about, we know who they are, we know what they have to say. That doesn't get us any closer to know-

ing the truth of it, hearing them say it again."

The petition names seven witnesses who have said they saw at least one other person with McVeigh in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, the day a truck bomb ripped through the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 people.

None of the witnesses was called before the federal grand jury primarily concerned with indicting McVeigh and Nichols.

Key and Wilburn also want the panel to look into a shadowy network of white supremacists and foreign nationals and to ask hard questions about rumors that agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had prior

knowledge of the attack.

The witness at the intersection of those two beliefs is Carol Howe; a former ATF informant now awaiting a federal trial on charges related to a bomb threat.

A few days after the bombing, Howe, a former Tulsa debutante, told FBI agents she had overheard German national Andreas Strassmeir and white supremacist Dennis Mahon discuss bombing federal buildings months before the attack.

"Why in heck haven't the feds gone out and brought these guys in?" Key asks. Strassmeir and Mahon have denied involvement in the bombing, and Mahon calls Howe a drug abuser and compulsive liar.

If called, Howe is expected to

testify that she told her ATF handlers about the conversations before the bombing.

But those familiar with documents in her case, including McVeigh attorney Stephen Jones, say they show no specific threats or plots. Jones tried to call Howe during McVeigh's federal trial, but the judge ruled her testimony irrelevant.

Whether Howe will testify before the grand jury is unknown. Key hopes to steer the grand jury toward Howe, Strassmeir and Mahon, but his ability to do so is limited, as Oklahoma law does not allow the petitioner to go before the panel unless called to testify. He can, however, present written material.