

Key Wants Focus Returned to Elohim City

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It's back to Elohim City for the Oklahoma County grand jury investigating theories that more than two men were behind the Oklahoma City bombing - if Rep. Charles Key gets his way.

Key, R-Oklahoma City, and his supporters want grand jurors to question FBI agents and U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents about any investigations of the white separatist community in eastern Oklahoma.

Jurors reconvene today.

Key contends that Elohim City residents helped in the bombing and that government agents knew or should have known about it. His theory is at odds with the federal prosecutors who won convictions against bomber Timothy McVeigh and his co-conspirator Terry Nichols. Their prosecutors believe only those two men were directly involved in the April 19, 1995, attack.

An ATF informant had visited Elohim City, but sources have told The Oklahoman the FBI denies it had any investigation.

Key wants FBI agents questioned because he contends there is proof there were two investigations - an ATF report on ATF informant Carol Howe.

The report tells how FBI officials requested a meeting with the ATF once the FBI became aware of an ATF investigation.

Key and his investigators claim the FBI stopped a planned raid by ATF agents who could have arrested Elohim City resident Andreas Strassmeir, an illegal resident from Germany, in February 1995.

Sources told The Oklahoman there never was enough proof of terrorist activity to warrant an FBI investigation.

"Everybody suspected that at various times that they perhaps assisted it or in some ways furthered that type of activity," the government source said. "But nobody had enough to cause an investigation of them."

The source described the February 1995 meeting between the FBI and ATF as an informational meeting.

"The purpose was to find out what the status of the ATF inquiry was," the source said. "If any plans were under way to conduct any raid or any other type activity."

An earlier grand jury witness, Elohim City leader the Rev. Robert Millar, denied any connection to the Oklahoma City bombing.

Strassmeir, who was staying at Elohim City at the time of the bombing, tops the list of others Key said should be indicted by the county grand jury.

"I got a gut feeling, like a lot of us do, that he might have been a provocateur," Key said. "He was maybe an inside government agent, and he was inside saying, 'Yeah, you gotta do this and do that' and kept things rolling along.'

"I am sure the plan was not to make sure the building got blown up, but help ensure that this thing got tempted, and it got busted."

McVeigh made a phone call to Elohim City asking for Strassmeir two weeks before the bombing, records show.

Strassmeir, who has left the United States, has denied any involvement in the bombing. He said he suspects McVeigh asked for him because they once met at a Tulsa gun show.

The ATF was investigating Strassmeir for illegal firearms and an expired visa, 1995 Immigration and Naturalization Service reports show.

Howe worked for the ATF in fall 1994 and spring 1995. She has given conflicting information about what she learned as a paid ATF informant.

Two days after the bombing, she identified the men pictured in the government's John Doe sketches of the bombing suspects as brothers Pete and Tony Ward, men she had seen at Elohim City.

In her statement to FBI agent James R. Blanchard and her ATF supervisor Angela Finley Graham, Howe said she had heard Strassmeir and Dennis Mahon, a White Aryan Resistance leader from Tulsa, talk about blowing up federal buildings.

Howe said Strassmeir and Mahon, who associated with people living in Elohim City, made trips to Oklahoma City in November 1994, December 1994 and February 1995. She said she joined them on the December trip.

However, Howe said in a Feb. 28, 1995, ATF report and in testimony at her July 1997 trial that she went to Oklahoma City with Millar, Zara Patterson III and Zara Patterson IV and others from Elohim City. She did not mention a trip with Mahon or Strassmeir.

Finley has said she and Howe went to Oklahoma City on Feb. 8, 1995, to retrace Howe's trip. The Murrah Building was not one of the three place Howe took Finley.

The government has said agents could not act on Howe's information because it was not specific enough.

Under oath at her trial, Howe admitted she was not specific and never wrote down information about the warnings.

Key also wants the grand jury to indict Mahon, Howe's focus in her undercover ATF work.

"There are some people who wonder how Mahon has gotten away with so much and never been interviewed before or after the bombing," Key said. "So there are some who think he is turning information or evidence to the FBI, specifically as opposed as to ATF."

Mahon, an earlier grand jury witness, denies any involvement in the bombing.

Besides the Elohim City connection, Key presented a list of 150 witnesses he wants to testify and about 1,000 pages of information for the jury to read.

Much of the information, however, is from stories published in conspiracy-oriented books, magazines and newspapers.

Some of Key's potential witnesses deny the statements attributed to them in some of the stories and by Key and his bombing investigation committee.

Other potential witnesses are some of the writers of the books, magazine and newspaper stories.

Key defends the validity of the material he presented the jury and the credibility of the witnesses he wants to testify before the grand jury.

Although he admits he does not know how accurate the stories are, he says he believes the jury should read them.

Key and the late Glenn Wilburn, who lost two grandsons in the bombing, headed the petition drive to call the grand

jury.

The grand jury convened June 30 to investigate possible larger conspiracies involving the bombing that resulted in 168 deaths.

McVeigh, 29, was convicted in June and sentenced to die. Nichols, McVeigh's Army buddy, 42, was convicted of a conspiracy charge in the bombing.

Nichols is awaiting sentencing.

Key wants the grand jury to indict McVeigh, Nichols and Michael Fortier, one of McVeigh's friends.

Oklahoma County District Attorney Bob Macy said he will not prosecute Fortier because he signed a plea agreement with federal prosecutors.

"I have no reason to revoke that," Macy said.

He said he also plans to use Fortier as a witness in the state bombing trials.

But Key said he believes the plea agreement was a "bad deal."

"It is real flimsy. It was a bad deal on Fortier, bad. It made me think that there was probably more to the agreement than was written on paper," Key said.

Fortier admitted he failed to notify the government about the bombing and then lied to investigators.

His sentencing is pending.

Macy also said if the grand jurors have not been made aware of his intentions to prepare a case against McVeigh and Nichols, he will make sure they know how critical it is that they let him do that.

"It is in the best interest of the citizens of Oklahoma for me to be very careful and file this case at the right time," Macy said. "If the grand jury indicts McVeigh and Nichols, it will greatly restrict the amount of time I have to prepare my case properly. It is in everybody's best interest if the case is filed when it is best prepared."

He said he cannot begin to prepare his case until he gets the evidence used in the federal cases.

Macy said he doesn't expect to get that evidence until after Nichols is sentenced.

Key also presented the grand jury with what he said is a copy of Fortier's telephone calls at his home in Kingman, Ariz. The record shows a four-second call made April 27, 1995, from The Regency Tower, a block west of the bomb site.

Key's investigators, who are paid with private donations, got the record from William Jasper, a reporter for the John Birch Society's New American magazine.

Sources told The Oklahoman they suspect the record may be a phony.

The record shows R.D. Hardin, who lived in the building in the months before the bombing, made the call. But Hardin moved out of the building five or six months before the bombing. And the phone was not in service at the time of the call, sources said.

The FBI seized possession of the apartments almost immediately after the bombing. It was damaged extensively in the bombing.

Key questions what happened after the FBI secured the building.

Despite prior testimony and records to the contrary, Key and his followers have again presented information and witnesses who insist the Oklahoma County bomb squad truck was near the Murrah Building prior to the explosion.

They also say bomb squad members were at the bomb site searching the bushes at the federal building days before the bombing.

Key reported that one witness, Renee McNeely, told people she saw the county's bomb squad truck in the vicinity of the federal courthouse.

McNeely, whose six-month-old son was killed in the Murrah Building, told The Oklahoman she never saw the bomb truck "anywhere that day."

"The things he has said about me and the things I said are not true. ... The things he has said I told people are not anywhere near what I said," McNeely said.

Kathy Wilburn, the late Glenn Wilburn's wife, said McNeely was invited to her home along with other parents of children killed in the Murrah Building's day-care center.

Kathy Wilburn said McNeely told her and her husband that she saw the bomb truck downtown before the bombing.

"My husband was in disbelief. He said, 'Oh, Renee, how do you know? Are you sure?' She said, 'Yeah, they had big blue letters on their jackets that said bomb squad.' " Wilburn said.

Bill Grimsley, who drove the bomb squad truck, testified before the grand jury in November.

He said he drove the truck from the Oklahoma County jail about 7 a.m. and parked near the county courthouse, which is about three blocks south of the Murrah Building site.

Grimsley, who is also the supervisor of the county sheriff's courthouse security detail, said he stopped at the county courthouse to do his morning lineups and duty assignments.

After he finished at the courthouse, Grimsley said, he drove the truck to the county's training center at Air Depot and NE 36 for a training exercise.

The sheriff's department gave the grand jury a file cabinet drawer full of records that include training schedules, the whereabouts of bomb squad members that day and their statements.

Training schedules from 1995 show that exercises were scheduled for the third Wednesday of every month that year. BIOG: NAME: UPD:

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