

Investigations Continue in OKC



NPR All Things Considered

June 5, 1998 | Wade Goodwyn, Robert Siegel

ROBERT SIEGEL, HOST: The legal saga of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols is far from over. Yesterday, Nichols was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the Oklahoma City bombing. But the Oklahoma City district attorney plans to prosecute Nichols and McVeigh again on state murder charges. And for nearly a year now, a grand jury has been trying to sort out the still unanswered questions and conspiracy theories about the bombing.

From Oklahoma City, NPR's Wade Goodwyn reports.

WADE GOODWYN, NPR REPORTER: It's been over three years since that bright spring morning in Oklahoma City when, in the space of just a few seconds, 168 people lost their lives. The 4,800-pound fertilizer bomb which destroyed the Murrah Federal Building also left in its wake questions about whether others, in addition to McVeigh and Nichols, were involved.

And some in Oklahoma City believe that federal law enforcement authorities knew about the bombing plot, and having failed to stop it are now covering up their previous knowledge. Oklahoma State Representative Charles Key (ph) is one of those accusing the federal government of a cover-up.

CHARLES KEY, OKLAHOMA STATE REPRESENTATIVE: There's no question in my mind that there are other perpetrators involved, people that were in that circle that were either informants -- maybe even actually a government agent who had infiltrated that group, and that they don't want those paths to be travelled.

GOODWYN: Key and other conspiracy theorists believe that the FBI knew through an informant that a plot to blow up a federal building was in the works. It is a charge the FBI has repeatedly denied.

Nevertheless, two years ago, Key and other supporters gathered thousands of

signatures and last June, they convened a citizen's petition grand jury.

That grand jury has been investigating the conspiracy theories which have swirled around the bombing from the beginning. Key believes that informants warned the government about rumors of bombing plots against federal buildings in Oklahoma.

KEY: Carol How (ph) is maybe the best case in point. She was paid by the ATF to infiltrate the Oklahoma City compound in eastern Oklahoma. She gave her handlers information prior to the bombing of people making direct threats against the Murrah Federal Building and the IRS Building in Oklahoma City.

GOODWYN: Elohim (ph) City is a small enclave of white, anti- government activists in eastern Oklahoma. Telephone records show that Timothy McVeigh made a short phone to Elohim City just before the bombing. But the FBI says it has been unable to pursue that lead any further.

And that's just one of the many stories this grand jury has been investigation. Oklahoma Congressman Ernest Istook is one of the witnesses who appeared before the grand jury. Soon after the bombing, two sheriff's deputies came forward to say that they heard the congressman exclaim that the bombing was the work of Muslim extremists and that the government had been warned.

But Istook says he knew nothing.

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE ERNEST ISTOOK (R-OK): I volunteered to appear before the grand jury when some off the wall statements came out that supposedly I might know something, because certainly I had no advance knowledge that the bombing was going to happen, or anyway to expect it or to anticipate it.

GOODWYN: Since his appearance before the grand jury, Istook has been a public critic -- not of the grand jury itself, but of the motives of those behind it.

ISTOOK: Michael Fortier has been convicted, and is going to prison, and has been in prison, because he knew in advance that a bombing was being plotted and was going to occur, which took 168 lives and he did nothing about it. That is a horrible, horrible accusation, and it should not be thrown around loosely.

GOODWYN: Yet the congressman himself hesitates when asked if he believe all those responsible for the bombing have been caught. And that uncertainty about the man the FBI called John Doe Number 2 is another one of the driving forces behind the grand jury. Several witnesses saw Timothy McVeigh with a man who wasn't Terry Nichols when he rented the Rider truck which was used to blow up the

building.

B.Z. Loughton (ph) was on the eighth floor of the federal building when the bomb went off. He's one of the lucky few who came through the blast relatively unscathed. Loughton is an enthusiastic supporter of the grand jury's investigation.

B.Z. LOUGHTON, BOMBING SURVIVOR: We want the truth. We know we haven' t been told the truth. Judge Matsch knows we haven't gotten the truth. He tried to induce Nichols into telling everything that he knew. He said, "you know, if you tell what you know," he said, "I'll give -- I'll adjust your sentence proportionately."

GOODWYN: Judge Richard Matsch, who presided over the trials of Nichols and McVeigh, in fact urged the FBI to continue its investigation. And some of Terry Nichols' jurors said after the trial that they believe there were other co- conspirators. No one knows when the Oklahoma City grand jury will wrap up its investigation. By the end of this month, the grand jurors begin their second year of work.

I'm Wade Goodwyn, NPR News, Oklahoma City.