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Feazell, attorneys consult

*Lawyers map plan
on grand jury probe*

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AUSTIN — McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell — declaring that "Fort Feazell" is under siege — met Friday in Austin with his attorneys to begin an investigation to determine what allegations are being considered by a federal grand jury looking at reported misconduct on the part of Feazell.

The embattled district attorney Wednesday announced he hired the Austin law firm of Minton, Burton, Foster & Collins to represent him in the federal grand jury probe.

He and his attorneys began preliminary discussions of the federal investigation at the Friday meeting in Austin.

"At this stage, you can't even think in terms of defense. About all we can do is try to begin our own investigation and try to keep abreast of whatever investigation is taking place on the other side," said attorney Charles R. Burton.

"You don't sit back and wait. You try and find out from any source . . . what the focus of the investigation is, and then do the kind of preparation we have to do to prevent an indictment from taking place, or to prepare a defense if there is an indictment," Burton said.

U.S. Attorney Jan Patterson

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Embattled DA says 'Fort Feazell' under siege

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confirmed Monday that a federal grand jury probe of Feazell is being conducted. Several sources familiar with the probe say Patterson is confident she will be able to obtain an indictment of Feazell.

Feazell said an indictment "doesn't mean anything but finger-pointing," but two days after the federal probe was confirmed, Feazell obtained the services of what is considered one of the state's top defenders of public officials.

The law firm headed by Roy Q. Minton has defended dozens of public officials in Texas, including Billy Clayton, a former speaker of the House of Representatives.

The law firm in March successfully defended Attorney General Jim Mattox on charges of commercial bribery. Feazell said it was Mattox who suggested he hire Minton.

Ms. Patterson said from her Austin office Friday that she was not surprised Feazell had obtained legal counsel. She declined to say when the federal jury would continue its consideration of Feazell.

It was thought the grand jury would reconvene Friday but, instead, a different federal grand jury unrelated to the Feazell investigation met.

Marquette Overs of the U.S. Clerk's office in Austin confirmed that the grand jury that met Friday was a different grand jury from the one investigating Feazell that met Monday.

She said the grand jury investigating Feazell is "sealed," and she cannot say when it will meet again.

Feazell said he is preparing to defend "Fort Feazell," an allusion to the nickname that was given to the McLennan County district attorney's office shortly after Feazell took over in 1983.

Shortly after he took office, Feazell instituted a locked-door policy at the DA's office, requiring visitors to check in at a front desk before entering.

Some attorneys accustomed to being able to walk in and out and visit with assistant district attorneys, resented the increased security and began calling Feazell's office "Fort Feazell."

Feazell apparently liked the nickname, printing bumper stickers reading, "I visited Fort Feazell."

Feazell said he believes the federal investigation is in retaliation for his investigation of confessions given to the Texas Rangers Homicide Task Force by mass murderer Henry Lee Lucas.

Ms. Patterson has denied the investigation is related to the Lucas grand jury, adding that the probe of Feazell has been going on for several months.

Although Ms. Patterson has had very little to say about the federal probe, Burton indicated he was surprised Ms. Patterson had any comment.

"It's my experience that they would not make any comment about a case at the grand jury stage," Burton said. "It is a secret proceeding, and the purpose of the secrecy is to protect the person who is under investigation. They normally wouldn't want that person injured or damaged just because of the fact of a grand jury investigation."

Burton said neither he nor Min-

ton has talked to Ms. Patterson, but that law partner Rip Collins did meet recently with the federal prosecutor.

Burton said he would not be surprised if Feazell never is asked to testify before the federal grand jury.

"Most often the defendant is completely out of the grand jury process," he said. "The accused has no right to be a participant in that process. He has no right even to have notice that he is being investigated."

Ms. Patterson said the federal grand jury could meet for as long as 18 months, and that the jury's term could be extended for an additional six months.

"We've had some federal grand jury investigations which have lasted for three or four years, being passed from one grand jury to the next," Burton said.

Burton said his law firm specializes in the defense of public officials.

"We certainly enjoy that area of practice, and we've been favored by having some very well-known people as clients over the years,

who also happen to be officeholders.

"We hope it's because we have a reputation for doing a good job representing the public officials.

I'm sure the fact that we're here in Austin also has a great deal to do with it. We're available and on the scene where a great number of these cases originate," he said.