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For Feazell, more than an election

Indicted McLennan DA depending on 'average people' for victory

Associated Press

WACO — McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell, who faces charges of settling criminal cases in exchange for bribes, says he is confident going into Tuesday's election because "I'm like an honest Huey Long."

"You ask anyone if Vic Feazell was indicted because he took bribes and they'll say, 'No, he was indicted because he steps on the wrong toes,'" Feazell says. "It's the average people saying that."

Feazell contends that his legal problems stem from his investigation that discredited scores of murder confessions made by Henry Lee Lucas, and from his casting himself with groups such as farmers, blue-collar workers and minorities.

He says he likes rankling "the bureaucrats," "greedy out-of-town bankers" and "the knotheds at the country club who think they can sit around and run things."

The Rev. R.L. Whitworth, pastor of the Calvary Assembly of God, said 99 percent of his 1,000-member



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congregation is backing Feazell, an ordained Baptist minister who visits pulpits regularly.

"A lot of people around here just won't believe a guy who's a preacher would do anything

wrong," state Rep. M.A. Taylor told the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "People either hate him or love him. There may be more of the latter."

Dave Deaconsen, an attorney in a firm considered locally to be the heart of Feazell's Republican opposition, says even his colleagues are beginning to concede that Feazell will not perish by ballot.

"Obviously, there's been a lot of strange things happening," says Robert Miller, chairman of the political science department at Baylor University. "Feazell is a very charismatic candidate. (He's) theatrical."

Miller, who says he isn't voting for Feazell, contends that one of the incumbent's biggest advantages is that his opponent, Republican Paul Gartner, is perceived as bland.

A key part of Feazell's campaign has been the shackled, double thumbs-up sign that the prosecutor flashed after he was arrested by federal agents on Sept. 17. "Go Get 'Em Vic" bumper stickers, which feature the sign, can be seen around

Waco.

"If the Romans didn't put Christ on a cross, Christianity wouldn't have had a symbol," Feazell says. "Where would Christianity be without the cross?"

A Feazell campaign commercial features a shot of Feazell in handcuffs and another in a courtroom. The announcer says: "Vic has fought for what he knows and you know is right, despite the consequences."

Gartner, who lost to Feazell in 1982, has refused to campaign against Feazell on the grounds of his arrest.

"I'm not going to attack him. I'm just not. It's not my way of doing things," Gartner says.

In a trial set for Feb. 2 in Austin, Feazell faces 12 federal counts of taking bribes. The election results will affect the case, he says.

"If I win big, I think you'll see them backing off," Feazell says. "It might not even go to trial."

"If I lose, I'm probably going to prison."