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Analysts: publicity may work to Feazell's good

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When he announced his intention to seek a second term as McLennan County's district attorney, Vic Feazell called himself a "country lawyer" who didn't understand "that high-level stuff" surrounding a federal investigation of his office.

But some say Feazell has an eye for higher political office, that the "country lawyer" has garnered considerable statewide exposure in the past five months because of his involvement in two controversial grand jury investigations, and that he could gain from a political "trial by fire."

Feazell, currently under scrutiny by a federal grand jury in Austin for alleged misconduct in office, has been featured in newspaper reports in the *Dallas Morning News*, *Dallas Times Herald* and *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

Feazell was the focus of numerous critical reports broadcast by WFAA-TV, Channel 8, in Dallas, and is currently the focus of a series of



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reports by KDFW-TV, Channel 4, in Dallas.

More Feazell stories reportedly are being prepared in Dallas, Austin and Houston.

Gene Evans, McLennan County Democratic Party chairman, said he believes all the publicity surrounding the federal grand jury investigation of Feazell and the McLennan County grand jury probe of convicted murderer Henry Lee Lucas eventually could work to Feazell's

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Some say media flak may help Feazell in long run

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advantage.

"I would think it could," Evans said. "(Feazell's) been featured night after night after night on one Dallas channel, and now I understand another (television station) is running stories. He's been in Dallas, Fort Worth and Austin papers, and I understand a Houston (television) station has been running something on it.

"It's not going to be negative (overall) if (Feazell's) not indicted, or is indicted and proved innocent," he said. "That sort of proves all the negative he got was undeserving. At least in the public's eye.

"If you look at the polls, that's pretty much what happened with Mattox. Mattox came out of his thing as the people's hero. (Mattox) took on big oil and they tried to slap him, and the court said that he was innocent," Evans said.

In March, an Austin jury acquitted Mattox of commercial bribery charges, after the attorney general was indicted and accused of threatening the bond business of the Houston law firm of Fulbright & Jaworski.

"There are a lot of different schools of thought on this type of situation," Evans said. "I know that years ago, even talk of indictment would be bad news for people in politics. But we've sat here and watched John Connally on the Republican side, and Jim Mattox on the Democratic side, be indicted and proven innocent. It's something that is not as strange as it used to be."

In mid-July, Feazell announced for re-election. At the same news conference, he said he had hired the Austin law firm of Minton, Bur-

"You can look at (state comptroller) Bob Bullock, and Mattox and Clayton, they've gone through their catharsis, their test by fire, and come out of it not dramatically damaged," Reid said.

"It's not publicity that I'm seeking," Feazell said Thursday. "Channel 8 came down here and did a chop job ... and now finally some other people have cared enough to look at what the facts are. I'm not exactly pleased with the idea of being called a crook on statewide television."

Feazell first started attracting the attention of Dallas-area media in 1984 when his office broke the Lake Waco triple murders case, and began successful prosecution of those involved.

In early April, a month after Mattox was found not guilty of commercial bribery, Feazell and Mattox launched what would become a three-month-long grand jury probe of confessions made by Lucas. Lucas, a one-eyed drifter, claimed at one time to have killed as many as 600 people.

During the first week of the Lucas probe in Waco, as many as 12 Texas and Louisiana television stations filed reports on the proceedings, with Mattox and Feazell fielding questions side by side.

As the probe proceeded, Mattox dropped out of the day-to-day sessions of the grand jury, and Feazell increasingly became the visible focus of media reports.

Evans said it's hard to determine the total worth of near-daily exposure on major-market television and in the Southwest's largest newspapers. Although much of the publicity surrounding Feazell has been negative, it has been free.

date, and say 'Here's what it cost you to be on (the news).' You'd be talking big bucks," Evans said.

"Right now (Feazell's) kind of being tried in the media," Reid said. "We keep hearing from some of our people that perhaps not enough is being said about Feazell in the media, and not enough has come out. And then I hear from the other side that too much has already been said, and (Feazell) is being portrayed as guilty by association and guilty by innuendo."

Feazell said that the federal probe of himself and his office was initiated because he was critical of the Texas Rangers Homicide Task Force's work with Lucas.

Feazell claims the director of the Department of Public Safety, Col. Jim Adams, Waco City Manager David Smith and Waco Police Chief Larry Scott have been involved in investigations of Feazell and his office.

Adams would not confirm or deny a DPS investigation. Smith and Scott say no Waco Police investigation ever existed.

Reid said he believes the Lucas grand jury was "designed as a PR situation for (Feazell)."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jan Patterson is handling the federal grand jury investigation of Feazell. She will not comment on when the grand jury is meeting or when the probe will be completed.

She said a federal grand jury can meet for up to two years.

A clerk in the U.S. District Clerk's office in Austin said that since the federal grand jury proceedings are held in private, if a person is no-billed, no public record will be filed.

Ms. Patterson has declined to say what charges the federal

grand jury is considering.

A television news series on Channel 8 focused on what reporter Charles Duncan believed were questionable dismissals of drunken driving and drug arrests. Duncan said certain Waco attorneys were charging up to \$3,000 to have DWI cases dismissed, a criminal charge Duncan said lawyers usually charge around \$600 to defend.

According to Duncan, the FBI investigation of Feazell began in December. Feazell says he believes the FBI investigation started in April, after the Lucas grand jury already had begun.

During the Lucas probe, it was suggested that Feazell and Mattox were trying to gain publicity for upcoming political races, and that Mattox might run for governor and Feazell for attorney general.

Although Feazell and Mattox were quick to squash the rumors, and Feazell has announced officially his bid for re-election, Feazell hasn't denied he may consider running for a state office in 1990.

"As far as politics, I'm not at all interested in that right now. It's always speculation. I take that as people thinking that I've done a good job and maybe I'm worthy of higher office," Feazell said.