

# Fezell acquitted, blasts foes

By George Kuempel  
*Austin Bureau of The News*

AUSTIN — McLennan County District Attorney Vic Fezell kissed his weeping wife, hugged his attorney and jubilant supporters and blasted prosecutors after his acquittal Monday on federal racketeering charges.

"The Justice Department and the FBI are heralding the way for a new fascism," said Fezell, who contended that the charges against him were brought in retaliation for his investigation of confessions obtained by law enforcement officials from admitted serial killer Henry Lee Lucas.

"I believe the American system of justice needs some strong, strong changes, or we are on the way to be-

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coming a police state — a fascist state," he said.

A jury of six men and six women deliberated about six hours over two days before finding Feazell, 36, innocent of charges that he accepted \$19,000 in payments from Waco attorneys in exchange for dismissing or reducing drunken driving and drug charges against their clients.

Sixty-five prosecution witnesses and 19 defense witnesses testified during the five-week trial.

Feazell, an ordained Baptist minister, closed his eyes, lowered his head and rested his chin on his folded hands after the verdict was announced.

About two dozen family members and supporters who traveled to Austin to be with him during the jury deliberations reacted with cheers and sobs of relief when the verdict was read by U.S. District Court Judge James Nowlin.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Frels, who directed the prosecution, declined to comment, saying only, "What can I possibly say right now?"

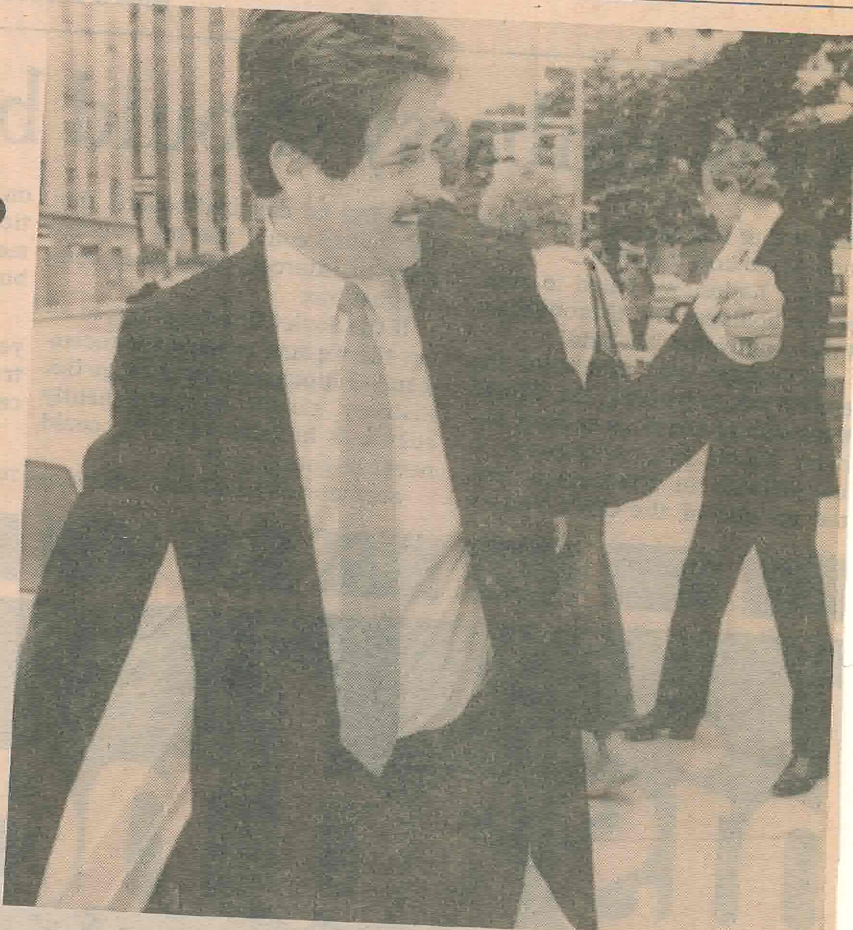
Feazell attributed the verdict to God, defense attorney Gary Richardson and the jury.

"I won because of the common sense of the people on the jury, because God has been with me every step of the way and because I have got the best lawyer in the United States of America," he said.

Feazell reiterated his belief that the charges were brought in retaliation for the Waco grand jury investigation he directed two years ago into law officers' handling of the Lucas case.

Lucas had confessed to hundreds of murders but later recanted, saying he had made them because he wanted to embarrass law officers who he said provided him details about the murders and even guided him to the crime scenes.

"If I had not stepped on the toes of the Texas Rangers this would never have happened," Feazell said, referring to the rangers who coordinated the Lucas investigation.



Associated Press

McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell gives the thumbs-up sign Monday as he leaves federal court in Austin after being acquitted of racketeering charges.

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— Vic Feazell

Feazell said the Texas Department of Public Safety — of which the Texas Rangers are a part — had urged federal authorities to investigate him, an assertion that investigators denied.

A DPS spokesman also denied that charge, noting that law officers had testified that the Feazell investigation began before the district attorney launched his inquiry into the Lucas confessions.

Feazell said that the trial has cost him "every penny I got, and I will be in debt the rest of my life."

Feazell was re-elected to a new four-year term as district attorney

last November after he was indicted.

A federal grand jury had indicted Feazell on eight counts of mail fraud and two counts of racketeering and conspiracy, but the mail fraud charges were dismissed by the judge as the trial neared its end last week.

Prosecutors had detailed 14 instances in which they said Feazell had received bribes from attorneys in exchange for dismissing or reducing criminal charges against their clients.

Those cases, they said, formed "a pattern of racketeering activity." If he had been convicted, Feazell could have been sentenced up to 20 years in prison on each count and fined \$250,000.

Two of the lawyers who said they made payments to Feazell, partners Don Hall and Dick Kettler of Waco, testified that Feazell wanted one-third of the legal fees they received for the cases he dismissed or reduced.

Feazell, who testified for about five hours in his behalf during the trial, denied the charges and accused the federal government of tapping his telephone and burglarizing his office.