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Alleged document forgery attracts FBI's interest

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OZARK — An investigation into the alleged forgery of an official document by members of the Christian County Commission nearly three years ago has garnered the interest of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Lt. Steven J. Frisbie, custodian of records for the Missouri Highway Patrol in Jefferson City, told the News-Leader he could not release an investigation report into alleged forgery involving Commissioners John Grubaugh, Tom Huff and Bill Barnett because the case is still active. "I was told the feds had looked at this (case) and they are still interested in looking at the case," Frisbie said.

The allegations stem from a Jan. 22, 2007, incident when Billings resident Ernest O'Gaffney filed a Sunshine Law request for the minutes of a Dec. 28, 2006, public meeting. O'Gaffney, who has since died, questioned why the commission's appointment of attorney John Housley as the county counselor was not noted in the Dec. 28 meeting minutes.

The forgery allegations were included in an open records law-

suit brought by the state Attorney General against Grubaugh, Huff and Barnett. Barnett settled the suit last year, while Grubaugh and Huff settled Sept. 4.

In the lawsuit, then-Attorney General Jay Nixon cited a conflict of dates within a document that reflected a unanimous vote of the commissioners to hire Housley. The date at the top — and in the body — of the order is Dec. 28, 2006. But, at the bottom of the page and after each signature, the date is Dec. 29, 2006.

County Clerk Kay Brown said Grubaugh brought her the document Jan. 22 and told her to attach it to the Dec. 28 meeting minutes. Brown noted that Barnett's signature was on the document next to the Dec. 29 date, even though he was not present.

Also a statement by notary public Connie Dunn on the document's signature page reads, "There appears to be white out on the original document at the date issued, 12-28-06."

The Missouri Highway Patrol completed its investigation into the alleged forgery and passed it to the attorney general's office.

In October, the attorney gener-

al's office said they would not file charges related to the alleged forgery, citing lack of evidence.

And although the case remains open until the three-year state statute of limitations runs out Jan. 22, 2010, the same limitations don't apply to the federal government, said Don Ledford, spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas City.

Ledford said the federal statute of limitations depends on what crime is being investigated — such as forgery, public corruption, among others. He also said he couldn't comment about an investigation or even if they're looking into it. "And even if we were, that doesn't necessarily mean there'd be a prosecution."

Barnett said he was surprised the FBI may be looking into the case because no one had mentioned an ongoing investigation.

"I haven't heard anything about that," Barnett said. "I just figured the statute of limitations would run out on it and there wouldn't be anything done on it."

A message left Monday for Grubaugh wasn't returned.