Qualla Housing raided by FBI

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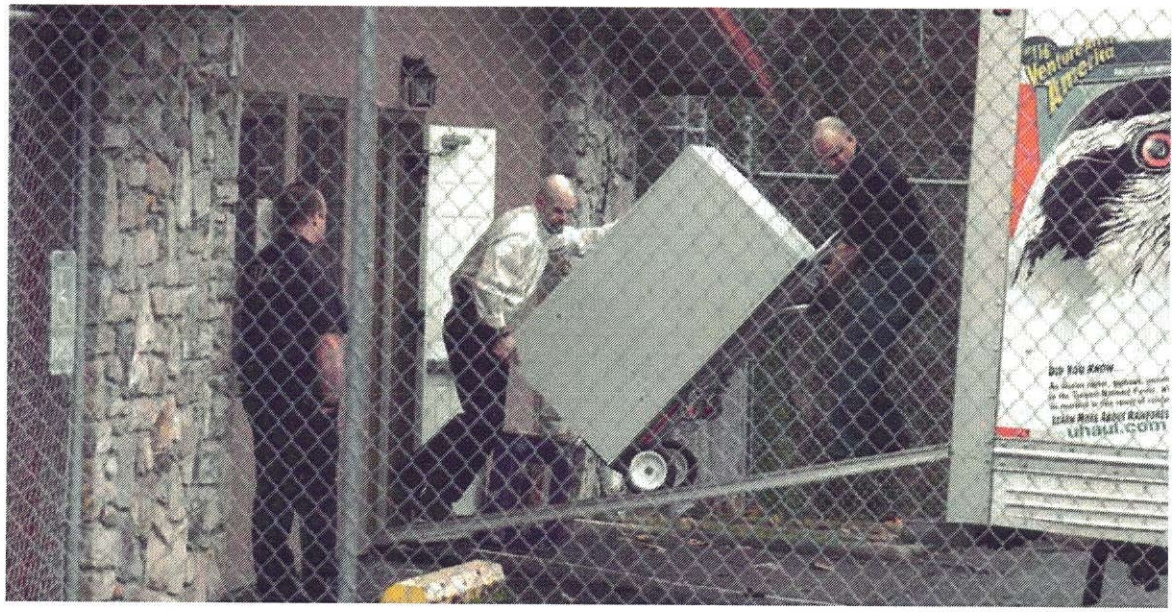
Almost four months to the day that Qualla Housing Authority (QHA) officials received a letter from the Department of Justice notifying them of an investigation "regarding possible criminal conduct", their offices were raided by FBI agents. The morning of Thursday, Feb. 2 was busy as agents loaded at least seven large, metal filing cabinets and other documents from the QHA offices into a U-Haul truck parked on the side of the building.

"The Cherokee people deserve accountability, and I plan on delivering on that," Principal Chief Patrick Lambert said in a statement on Friday. "It is unfortunate that we have reached a point where these issues have to reach the highest levels of investigation, especially by federal authorities. But, I was elected to expose and address the areas of misuse and abuse of our tribal resources. I will continue to do that job."

Chief Lambert had previously ordered for an independent forensic audit to be completed on Qualla Housing which he subsequently turned over to the FBI once they were completed.

Tribal officials confirmed that federal Grand Jury subpoenas were issued on Thursday to several Qualla Housing Authority staff at both the main office and a warehouse across town. In addition to the file cabinets which were seized, numerous boxes of documents and computer files were also taken into custody by the FBI.



SCOTT MCKIE B.P./One Feather photos

SEIZURES: Agents with the FBI seized numerous file cabinets, such as the one shown in the photo above, as well as boxes of documents and computer files during a raid at Qualla Housing Authority on the morning of Thursday, Feb. 2.

This comes on the heels of the letter sent in October 2016 which stated, in part, "The allegations under investigation include possible violations of federal program fraud, mail fraud, and wire fraud..."

The letter instructed QHA personnel and officials not to tamper with any documents relating to the case including "information concerning loans, loan applications, customer files, banking records, grant information, and all other business records".

The U.S. Attorney's Office confirmed that, as of press time, no charges or indictments have been filed in this case. A request for comment and additional information from the FBI went unanswered by press time.

RAID: Federal agents, along with Cherokee Indian Police Department officers, enter Qualla Housing on Thursday morning.