

Madison County Board chairman responds to investigation of "suspected" break-in

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EDWARDSVILLE — **Chairman Kurt Prenzler** is responding to a newspaper article late last week about reports of a break-in at the Madison County Administration building.

The Belleville News Democrat reported online Feb. 17 and in its print edition Feb. 19 about a “possible” break-in that cast suspicion on staff members in his administration, which started Dec. 5, 2016.

“The article was full of innuendos with no facts to back it up,” Prenzler said. “After 2½ months of investigating, the police found no evidence of a break-in.”

Prenzler said that he and retired U.S. Marine and County Board member, Don Moore, R-Troy, conducted a review Tuesday of a “suspected” break-in reported in mid-December.

The situation started when an employee with Madco Credit Union informed County Clerk Debra Ming-Mendoza that she suspected someone entered the office after hours and got into an unlocked filing cabinet containing loan applications. Mendoza told the employee to report it to the Sheriff’s Department.

The Sheriff’s Department turned the investigation over to the Edwardsville Police Department. The police department then requested security footage on Dec. 20 from the county administration building.

“They saw no unauthorized entry into the credit union, which is a single office located on the ground floor across from the IT Department,” Prenzler said. “Police Chief Jay Keeven said investigators have seen no evidence of forced entry and cannot verify the employee’s suspicions. The final report is not expected to be complete for a few more weeks.”

The BND tried to connect the “possible” break-in 10 days after Prenzler’s swearing in to the hiring of his staff.

“Don and I discovered the ‘master key’ for county offices dates back to 1992, when the building first opened,” Prenzler said. “There is nothing to prevent anyone from copying a master key except an inscription on the key ‘do not duplicate.’”

He said there is no log keeping track of who possessed master keys during the past 25 years. Cleaning crews have access to them as well, which they pick up and return each night.

Prenzler and Moore met with Mendoza and asked for “all evidence that anyone with his administration entered into her offices.”

“She told us there was none, and it was only because of rumors and sensitive information kept in her office that she ordered security cameras,” he said.

Prenzler and Moore then asked Gibbons the same question.

“He said he also had no evidence that anyone from my administration entered his office,” he said. “However, Mr. Gibbons said he is sure that someone ‘sat in his office chair’ and he is ordering additional security cameras for his office.”

Prenzler and Moore met with newly appointed Director of Facilities Rob Schmidt and the former Director Kurt Geschwend. They toured the building and noted in addition to locks on doors in the offices of the County Clerk and State’s Attorney, each door was protected by a keypad.

According to records in the facilities management office, the last time the State’s Attorney’s office changed the code to its keypads was September 2015. The County Clerk hasn’t changed its code since 2012.

During his six years as treasurer, Prenzler made sure his keypad code to the office was changed 2 to 3 times a year, and Geschwend confirmed it.

“Based on our review, the surveillance cameras were working, and didn’t record any evidence of unauthorized access,” Moore said. “The camera system is currently being expanded and improved in the administration building, which is a good thing. On the other hand, the county’s lock and key program needs to be upgraded.”

Prenzler plans to update the Building and Facilities committee during its regularly scheduled meeting Tuesday.