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Cattle Congress thought grounds would be used for Homeland Security training

DREW ANDERSEN, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO - Officials with the National Cattle Congress may have been misled by the federal government with regard to the use of their facilities.

Cattle Congress president Wally Mochal said he and the members of the board were under the impression that the grounds and facilities would be used by the Homeland Security Administration for training purposes.

The board did not know the grounds and facilities would be used to establish a detention center and a trial court for those accused of immigration-related crimes in the wake of a federal raid of the Agriprocessors food processing plant in Postville.

"Am I misled by my federal government? Probably frequently," said Mochal.

Though Mochal and the Cattle Congress board were under the impression the facilities would be used for training purposes, the lease does not specify a purpose for use of the grounds.

Mochal would not speculate on whether the board's decision to lease the property to the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) would have been different had they known the intended purpose.

"Our decision was largely a financial one," explained Mochal, who declined to comment on how much NCC profited from the lease. "April and May are typically slower months for us. We did not want to pass on the opportunity to have one of the stronger months of May that we've had in several years."

Mochal said the board did not foresee the negative public relations associated with its decision to lease the property.

The terms of the Cattle Congress lease with the GSA specified that the government would occupy the facility from May 1 to May 25. But according to Mochal, the federal government showed interest in the Cattle Congress grounds as early as Nov. 7.

GSA and HSA " had been up several times to inspect properties through late January," said Mochal. "But serious contract negotiations did not begin until March."

One stipulation of a supplemental lease required the Cattle Congress to provide catering for up to 800 people if requested. The main lease was for the use of the grounds as a whole with additional rates associated with each building used by the government.

"Our business is really leasing the facility and pieces of it," said Mochal. "Leasees do pretty much whatever they want to do. I guess the government did not do anything against that lease."

Cattle Congress general manager Doug Miller said the organization had received several calls recently from people who were upset that the Cattle Congress would lease its facilities to the government for the

purpose of hosting a detention center and trial court. However, he claimed to have no knowledge of the government's intentions with respect to the use of the Cattle Congress prior to the plant raid on Monday.

Nonetheless, Miller believes the government is using the facilities in a manner that reflects the best interest of its citizens.

"We just rented our facilities and our grounds, because they (the federal government) came in here and asked us if we would do that," said Miller. "I'm amazed that people would think we wouldn't rent our facilities to federal government."