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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2002 **

The Washington Times

California raids charter school with ties to terrorists

By Steve Miller
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

FBI assisting investigation of charges missing money went to militant

A California charter school with ties to the terrorist al-Fuqra network was raided last month by state law enforcement authorities, who left with 60 computers and 100 boxes of documents and letters.

The GateWay Academy Public Charter School, located on an 1,800-acre commune in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, has raised eyebrows since its inception two years ago.

GateWay was shut down last month, but only recently did the school become the target of a serious investigation.

"We are not denying the Fuqra

connection," said Hallye Jordan, a spokeswoman for the California Attorney General's Office. "But that is not the focus of this. We are looking into allegations of financial fraud."

But a California law enforcement source said the investigation is being conducted with an eye on the connection between some GateWay administrators and Pakistani cleric Sheik Sayyid Mubarak Ali Gilani. Sheik Gilani is the founder and leader of Muslims of America, a fundamentalist group of black Americans that federal authorities have tied to al-Fuqra.

"We are working with the feds

and our own task force here on that issue," said the official, who confirmed that the inquiry was being led by the FBI.

The state Justice Department is searching for a missing \$1.3 million in state money. GateWay's charter was granted by Fresno Unified School District, which revoked the charter Jan. 16.

"They had a \$1.3 million deficit when their whole budget was \$2.6 million," said Jill Marmolejo, Fresno school district spokeswoman. "An accounting was due Dec. 1, then we gave them an extension and they missed that. They just haven't been

forthcoming. And the more we dug, the more we found."

More troubling to federal and state law enforcement is the possibility that some or all of that missing money may have gone to Sheik Gilani in Pakistan.

A workers' compensation fraud scheme by a Muslims of America group in Colorado put more than \$300,000 in Sheik Gilani's coffers in the early 1990s.

Grievances against GateWay also include teaching of the Koran in one of the schools and failure to conduct proper criminal background checks on 88 employees.

GateWay was started by Khadijah Ghafur, 51, who lists herself as secretary of Muslims of America Inc. in papers filed in Nevada in December 2000.

She is also the founder of Baladullah, the 1,018-acre Muslims of America settlement outside Fresno, where GateWay was headquartered.

The settlement is also the site of the International Quranic Open University, which was founded by Sheik Gilani. Most recently, the commune has been visited several times by local authorities after a man studying at Quranic was arrested in August and charged with the murder

of a Fresno County sheriff's deputy.

Miss Ghafur, formerly named Deanna Moton, blames the demise of GateWay on anti-Muslim sentiment in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

"Knowing the danger of being a Muslim when Islamophobia is at its summit, not only would I still embrace Islam, I would rather to have been born Muslim," Miss Ghafur said in a statement given to the Fresno school district last month.

She filed a federal lawsuit against the Fresno school district last week, accusing her trustees of violating her freedom of religion and her freedom of expression.