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Subject: Draft letter to Specter and Stokes
(Date) THE HONORABLE ARLEN SPECTER United States Senate Washington, D.C. 20510 Dear Senator Specter: As you well know, the Assassination Records Review Board is an independent Federal agency created by the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 charged with overseeing the identification and release of records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The Review Boards mandate expires on September 30, 1997. Despite a record of efficient and cost-effective performance that has resulted in the release of thousands of records from Federal agencies and thousands of other records previously in private hands, several factors will prevent the complete and thorough review of all assassination records by that deadline. To begin with, the task assigned to the Review Board was unprecedented. During the drafting of the legislation, the time that would be required to complete the mandate could only be estimated. That estimate turned out to be unrealistic. The three-year timetable provided for in the authorizing legislation failed to account accurately for the complexity of the undertaking or the immense quantity of assassination-related documents. Furthermore, the requirements of the enabling legislation resulted in a necessarily protracted start-up phase. The prohibition against hiring (or detailing) federal employees, combined with the requirement that each staff member receive a Top Secret clearance, caused considerable delay in assembling a qualified staff. The Board was, in effect, not even given three full years to do its work. In addition, the 16-month delay in appointing the members of the Board meant that many agencies had to proceed with the review of their files without the benefit of Board guidance. Unfortunately, the agencies had to redo a significant amount of work once the necessary guidance was available. And finally, lengthy delays by some of the more than 25 federal agencies that currently have assassination-related files have compromised the Boards ability to proceed with its review. Many of these agencies are now, finally, devoting the necessary resources to their responsibilities under the JFK Act. For all of these reasons, the Board believes that it is necessary to seek a one-year extension of its mandate. A by-product of the slow start-up in our first year is a budget reserve equivalent to 25 percent of anticipated FY 1998 costs. Consequently, we would require, in addition to the funds carried over, considerably less than \$2 million to continue operations through the end of FY 1998. The question of whether a one-year extension will be sufficient to complete the record review process is a relevant one. It cannot, however, be answered by the Review Board alone since much depends on the cooperation and efficiency of the federal agencies that process assassination records. Although it is likely that some unreviewed records would remain, the Board is confident that the additional year will permit it to process all of the important Federal records and also to acquire other significant records currently in private Record
Body:
recstat:
DeliveryPriority: N
DeliveryReport: B
ReturnReceipt:
Categories: