

Creation of the Review Board was the result of a long and thorough process of bipartisan Congressional inquiry, debate, and compromise. Driven by acute public interest, the Congress considered a wide variety of approaches to the problem of restoring public confidence in government institutions. The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, signed into law by President Bush in October 1992, defined a process for the release of assassination-related material and created the Review Board to oversee and coordinate the process. The result was a unique and unprecedented approach to the important issue of the public's right to know about the activities of its government.

The Congress could have assigned this important task to already existing federal agencies, but it did not. It did not because it understood that for this effort to be successful, an independent body had to be given the responsibility and authority to act. The independence of the Review Board was a crucial element in the design of the process. The National Archives, which plays its own important role in the process outlined in the Act is neither equipped nor prepared to assume the delicate and critical responsibility of identifying the public's interest in a given record and then weighing that interest against the interest of federal government in preventing access. This role of mediation and evaluation is not an archivist's role. Moreover, the National Archives, as the custodian of numerous records that are closed to the public and therefore subject to the Board's review powers is not a disinterested party. They would face an insurmountable conflict of interest if they were to receive the Board's mission and mandate.

Elimination of the Review Board would not simply mean a return to the status quo. Such an action at this time would exacerbate, deepen, and fuel the very mistrust in government that gave rise to the Congressional action that created the Board in the first place. Such an action would have a disastrous and irreparable impact on public trust. The Review Board's work offers the promise to clarify one of the most troubling events of the 20th century. A premature end to the Review Board's activities will simply add to the speculation that the American government has something that it wants to hide.