

DRAFT

Hon. Barbara B. Kennelly
Member of Congress
201 Cannon Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Kennelly:

Thank you very much for your letter of May 7, 1997, regarding the work of the Assassination Records Review Board and the papers of Mr. William Manchester. I am pleased to have the opportunity to help clarify the record concerning Mr. Manchester's papers and the efforts the Review Board has taken with regard to them.

As you know, the Review Board is governed by the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992. All of our work and all of our authority derive from this legislation. It is our goal, in general, to help end the long-standing suspicion by many Americans that there are secret files that are keeping the truth from being known about the Kennedy assassination. I am pleased to report that we have received widespread support from many people in the American public who, in keeping with the spirit of the JFK Act, have generously donated to the National Archives their own records on the Kennedy assassination. For example, Mr. James Rankin, the son of the Warren Commission's General Counsel, J. Lee Rankin, donated more than 18 boxes of his father's papers related to his work for the Warren Commission. Many others have given of their time to advise the Review Board on records. For example, Robert Blakey, the Chief Counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations and Mr. David Belin, the General Counsel of the Rockefeller Committee, have both come to Washington and shared their experience with us.

At the time the JFK Act was passed, Mr. Manchester had several boxes of records that were held in storage at the President John F. Kennedy Library. These records were on courtesy storage, and Mr. Manchester was not charged anything for the safekeeping of the records or for the inventory of the records that was prepared by the Library. In effect, the taxpayers of the United States were subsidizing the safekeeping of Mr. Manchester's records. This safekeeping was perfectly appropriate -- many other Americans who possess valuable historical records have similarly made use of courtesy government storage. Libraries typically hold such records with the hope that the records ultimately will be deposited in the libraries and made available for the use of scholars and researchers.

It is our understanding that after the assassination, Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy arranged with Mr. Manchester -- a very talented historian whose works I much admire -- to write the story of the assassination of the President. Mr. Manchester's book, *Death of a President*, devotes many pages to the character and activities of Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination. Because he was, at least initially, performing his work in conjunction with Mrs. Kennedy's wishes, Mr. Manchester had unique

access to a wide range of governmental and official sources. He met with military officials, White House staffers, Secret Service agents, and many others. Some of those whom he interviewed met with him while they were on the government's payroll and with the government's consent.

When we learned about Mr. Manchester's papers at the Kennedy Library, determined that it would be appropriate for us to look at the materials that were, after all, *housed in a U.S. government facility, that pertained to the assassination of the President, and that were created with the helpful assistance of state, Federal, and local officials.* The only thing that we requested *was to look at the records to see what relevance or interest they might have.*

We made every reasonable attempt to discuss our desire to review the materials with Mr. Manchester and his attorney in an attempt to resolve the issues in an amicable way. Two members of my staff even traveled to Connecticut for the purpose of meeting with him and attempting to explain our wish simply to review the materials. Immediately after the meeting, we made a specific written proposal to Mr. Manchester's several months ago. Neither Mr. Manchester or his attorney responded to our request. Indeed, the first communication that we have seen from him since making the trip to Connecticut and our written proposal was his letter to you.

Although Congress wisely gave our agency subpoena powers, we have thus far chosen not to exercise them with respect to Mr. Manchester and we have attempted to be solicitous of his needs and concerns. We have waited for more than two years simply to look at the relevant records. We have sent unanswered proposals and we have traveled at some expense to meet with him at a time and place of convenience.

We do not question for one moment Mr. Manchester's sincerity, concern, or desire to do the right thing. We also recognize that he has donated many of the proceeds of his book to the Kennedy Library. But it does appear that Mr. Manchester's goal is *to control the raw material of history.* We believe that the circumstances of the assassinations should, as Congress wished, become known to the American people and not be sealed in government archives and controlled by people who do not want their contents to be known.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Hon. John R. Tunheim
Chairman
Assassination Records Review Board