

Dear Senator Specter:

As I know you are aware, the Assassination Records Review Board was created by the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 and is an independent federal agency charged with overseeing the identification and release of records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The Review Board was charged with completing its work by 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 many other records previously in private hands, several factors beyond the control of the Review Board will prevent the complete and thorough review of assassination records by that deadline. These factors include:

More Time than Originally Estimated is Necessary to Complete the Task.

The task assigned to the Review Board was unprecedented. During the drafting of the legislation, one could only estimate the time that would be required to complete the mandate. 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.

Long Start-up

Requirements of the enabling legislation resulted in a long 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. As a result, the Board was, in effect, not even given three full years to do its work.

Delay in the Appointment of the Board

The 16 month delay in appointing the members of the Board required that many agencies proceed with the review of their files without the benefit of Board guidance. This unfortunate lack of guidance resulted in the necessity for the agencies to redo a significant amount of work once necessary guidance was available.

Delays in Agency Processing

Lengthy delays by some of the more than 25 federal agencies that currently have assassination-related files has compromised the ability of the Board to proceed with its review.

The Board is therefore seeking a one-year extension of its mandate. The slow start-up in our first year has resulted in a Review Board reserve equivalent to 25 percent of anticipated FY 1998 costs. We estimate that the we would require, in addition to that reserve, considerably less than \$2 million to continue operations through the end of FY 1998.

Whether or not a one-year extension will be all that is required to complete the record review process is a relevant question. It cannot be completely answered by the Review Board since much depends on the cooperation and efficiency of the federal agencies that process assassination records. Although it is likely that some unreviewed records will remain if the Board succeeds in getting an extension, the Board is confident that the additional year will permit it to process all of the important federal records and acquire other important records currently in private hands that should be part of the JFK Collection.

The Board is not alone in its recognition that an additional year is necessary and desirable. The Board has received unanimous support for an extension from all of its major client agencies.

A premature termination of the Review Board would jeopardize the public confidence that was engendered by the JFK Act and the creation of the Board. The hard work that you and your colleagues put into the passage of the Act, and the accomplishments of the Board to date may, unfortunately, be overshadowed by a too-early termination of the Board, while important records remain to be reviewed.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the future of the Review Board with you and I stand ready to provide any additional information that you or your staff may require.

Sincerely,

John R. Tunheim
Chairman