

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

As you know, 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, several factors beyond the control of the Review Board will prevent the complete and thorough review of assassination records by that deadline. These include:

- The three-year timetable set in the authorizing legislation failed to account for the complexity of the undertaking or the immense quantity of assassination-related documents. More time than originally estimated is necessary to complete the task.
- Requirements of the enabling legislation required 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. The Board was, in effect, not given three full years to do its work.
- The delay in appointing 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 great deal of work.
- Lengthy delays by some of the more than 25 federal agencies that currently have assassination-related files.

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 estimated that the we would require, in addition to the funds carried over, considerably less than \$2 million to continue operations through the end of FY 1998.

Will a one-year extension be all that's required to complete the record review process? This question cannot be completely answered by the Review Board. 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 records.

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.

Sincerely,

John R. Tunheim  
Chairman