

December 31, 1997

The Honorable Dan Burton
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter is the Assassination Records Review Board's fifth monthly progress report, as required by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight report on H.R. 1553 (now P.L. 105-25), that extended the authorization of the Review Board until September 30, 1998.

At the December 15 closed meeting, the Board processed for public release more than 3,400 FBI records, nearly 300 CIA records, and approximately 400 records from other agencies. The 4,100 records processed by the Board is among its highest totals for a single meeting. In addition, the Review Board recently released approximately 800 pages of military records regarding U.S. policy toward Vietnam from 1963-64. Additional military records related to U.S. policy toward Cuba in the early 1960's will be ready for public release in January.

As I know you are aware, the two agencies that have the largest number of records, and in which there is the greatest public interest, are the FBI and the CIA. With respect to the FBI, we believe that as long as the review of records continues at the current pace, and provided that we are able to resolve two outstanding policy issues, we will be able to complete our review ahead of schedule. That said, during the month of December there was a significant decrease in the number of FBI records that were reviewed by the FBI staff and made available to us. The FBI has assured us that this was due to vacations and the holidays, and that it fully expects to be back on schedule in January. The FBI also has been highly responsive to our requests for additional information and records and we anticipate no significant obstacles in that regard.

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With respect to the CIA, we continue to have serious concerns that it is not making records available to us at a pace sufficient for us to complete our work on schedule. We have discussed this issue with the CIA on several occasions—most pointedly at a meeting on December 9, 1997. We continue to receive assurances from the CIA that its pace of review will improve and that it will devote sufficient resources to enable it to complete the task within the statutory deadline. We appreciate your having sent a letter to Director Tenet, and we anticipate that it will have the beneficial effect of urging the CIA to devote the necessary resources to completing the task. We also are concerned that the CIA has not acted with sufficient speed in responding to our requests for additional information and records. Although the CIA has responded to several of our requests, other requests have remained outstanding for more than two years despite promises to the contrary. On December 18, 1997, I sent a comprehensive letter to the CIA describing in detail the requests that we have made and the current status of the CIA's responses. I would be happy to make a copy of this letter available for your review.

We very much appreciate your having sent letters not only to the CIA, but to the IRS, the Library of Congress, and Chairman Shelby of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. We have not received any communications from these offices in response to your letters, although we have received, apparently coincidentally, a communication from the IRS stating its wish to resolve outstanding issues early in January. We will keep you advised of any developments.

Again, thank you for the assistance that you and your staff have provided to the Review Board. Please do not hesitate to have a member of your staff contact me if you have any comments or questions. I can be reached at 724-0088, ext 226.

Sincerely,

T. Jeremy Gunn
Executive Director