

February 3, 1998

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Mr. Jim DiEugenio
Chairman
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Dear Mr. DiEugenio:

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a few personal thoughts and to respond to your article entitled, "The Review Board's Public Comments (Part II)," which appeared in Probe, Vol. 5, No. 2 (January February, 1998). I thought that it might be of interest for you and your readers to receive the candid and personal thoughts of a staff member who has worked closely with the Review Board for more than three years.

It often seems to me that, unlike most other people, I don't know who killed President Kennedy. Although I believe that I am reasonably well aware of most of the important evidence, I see the evidence as being highly equivocal and pointing in different and inconsistent directions. In my opinion, starting with the Warren Commission, both government entities and individual researchers typically have been quick to find support for their beliefs in this equivocal evidence. Those who believe that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone point to evidence that supports a murder allegation, but ignore the impressive exculpatory evidence that he could have presented in his own self-defense. There is indeed at least some circumstantial evidence that would support the assassination as having involved a conspiracy that included organized crime, the Soviets, Pro-Castro Cubans, Anti-Castro Cubans, big business, Dallas right-wingers, CIA agents, FBI agents, Secret Service agents, or European assassins. (One can even argue that the attempt to differentiate among these many theories ignores the larger truth that organized crime, business, and the CIA are all connected in a much deeper way.)

Two of the very unfortunate characteristics of many JFK researchers—regardless of whether they believe in conspiracies or a lone-gunner—is how they analyze circumstantial evidence and how they treat people with whom they disagree. I am frequently astonished by the published invective against many government officials, members of the intelligence community, and fellow researchers. I have read articles that, based upon what I believe to be thin circumstantial evidence, accuse people of committing the heinous crimes of murder and treason. Some people exercise little restraint in

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attacking other peoples' motives, character, morality, patriotism, honesty, and fidelity to the Constitution. Serious scholars who search for the truth carefully collect the evidence, analyze its inconsistencies, consider ambiguities, and rigorously test their hypotheses. Unfortunately, others skim through the evidence in search of a particular nugget with which they can make startling allegations against fellow human beings.

In my opinion, the principal and single most important goal of the JFK Act was to declassify secret government files on the Kennedy assassination. The JFK Act established the Review Board not for the purpose of deciding whether JFK was killed as a result of a conspiracy, but to open the secret files so that the information becomes fully available to the public. The Board was not asked to reach any substantive conclusions about the assassination. Congress wisely did not impose ideological criteria on Board members. As far as I know, the Board members were never asked their opinions on the substantive issues of the assassination. And Board members never asked for the opinions of staff members before staff members were hired.

It appears that the principal concern of your Probe articles was not the degree to which the Board has been successful in accomplishing this statutory mission, but whether Board members' public comments reflect agreement or disagreement with your own opinions on the assassination. (I should state here that I have not attempted to determine whether the comments attributed to the Board members are accurate.) With all due respect, it is my opinion that the Review Board should be judged on whether it fulfills its statutory mission and not on whether an individual member agrees with you on any particular theory of the assassination. By this measure—*the true measure of fidelity to the JFK Act*—the Board has performed admirably. The Board has fought vigorously to release as much information as possible. Similarly, the Board and the staff have worked hard to locate additional records both within and outside of the government.

A Board member's personal opinion about the assassination becomes relevant to the true statutory mission only to the extent to which a bias might lead to additional withholding of information from the public. I have attended almost every closed meeting of the Board where decisions were made on records, *and never once did I hear any Board member even suggest that a record should not be opened because it contained information that did or did not comport with any theory of the assassination.* The Board has scrupulously opened all information without regard to any particular belief about the assassination. That is a fact. And that is the type of fact that is much more significant and relevant than the personal opinions of individual Board members.

That said, my personal preference would be for members of the Review Board and its staff to exercise restraint before offering opinions on substantive issues related to the assassination. I think

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that such restraint would help allay any possible public perceptions about the objectivity of Board members. But despite my own preference, I can assure you that I have never seen the individual opinions come in the way of Board members doing their job. It is the Board members' objectivity in releasing information that is noteworthy (and newsworthy for your readers), not their individual opinions.

On one additional matter, it would have been helpful if you had acquired the facts about Board-member compensation before alleging that the Board members "collect two full paychecks for working what is essentially a part-time job." In fact, Board members are compensated solely for the time that they are attending Board meetings in Washington, D.C., or traveling somewhere else on Board business, such as the public hearing in Los Angeles. Since becoming a Federal judge, Chairman Tunheim receives no compensation for his time or work. It would be helpful if all assassination researchers would be scrupulous about ascertaining the facts before printing accusations. (In all fairness I should note that the staff was, however, particularly enthusiastic about your intimation that they should receive higher compensation.)

Probe subscribers should be assured that Review Board members have consistently approached their task based on the facts and the law. As members of a Board created to promote openness in government, they have been more open than anyone reasonably could have expected. Their work demonstrates that there is no hidden agenda and that they are dedicated to making the record surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy as complete as possible and available to the American public.

While it may be more interesting to suggest that there is a conspiracy that is keeping information from surfacing, the facts here are both more benign and banal: the Board is releasing the secret files. We would all do well to keep our eyes on this goal rather than allowing ourselves to be distracted by inquiries and allegations related to ideological purity and political correctness.

Sincerely,

T. Jeremy Gunn
Executive Director