

June 4, 1997

The Honorable 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 was established 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 that the U.S. government has files that would reveal the truth about the Kennedy assassination and is keeping these files secret from the American people. 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, 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. Robert Blakey, the Chief Counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, and David Belin, the General Counsel of the Rockefeller Committee, have both come to Washington and shared their experience with us.

It is our understanding that after the assassination, Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy arranged with Mr. Manchester—a 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

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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, we determined that it would be appropriate for us to review 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. Contrary to Mr. Manchester's contention, we do not seek to seize his personal property, we have simply requested to review the material.

We made every reasonable attempt to discuss our desire to review the materials with Mr. Manchester and his attorney and 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 to review the materials. Immediately after the meeting, we wrote to Mr. Manchester and made a specific written proposal to Mr. Manchester's attorney several months ago. Neither Mr. Manchester nor his attorney have responded. Indeed, the first communication that we have seen from Mr. Manchester since we met with him in Connecticut and since 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. We believe that the circumstances of the assassination 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. Ironically, Mr. Manchester's desire to keep the records closed is more likely to lead to "misguided interpretations" than the simple act of opening them up.

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

Sincerely,

John R. Tunheim
Chair
Assassination Records Review Board