

Memorandum

To: Board Members

From: Tom Samoluk

cc: David Marwell

Date: April 5, 1995

Re: Suggested Talking Points for Media

I. Introduction

This memo, prepared at Jack's request and following conversations with members of the Board, contains suggested talking points for discussion of the Board's work with the media. These suggested talking points are from previous memos that I have prepared for Jack prior to various radio and television interviews.

II. Basic Talking Points

The basic points which we always try to use:

1. The ARRB is an independent federal panel, consisting of five private citizens .
2. The Board's mandate is to identify and secure the Kennedy assassination records.
3. It is up to the Board to determine which records are to be made public immediately and which ones will have postponed release dates.
4. The purpose of the law and the Board's work is to provide a full record to the American public, make it available at the National Archives, and allow interested parties to draw their own conclusions about what happened in Dallas 31 years ago.
5. The Board is not re-investigating the assassination of President Kennedy. Its focus is collecting the assassination records.

III. Other Key Talking Points for Interviews

In addition to the basic talking points about the Board, we have found that the following points are also important:

1. The Congress created the Board to have an independent, cost-effective and accountable process for the review and release of these documents.
2. The reality is that there continues to be an intense, unabated interest in the assassination, as reflected in the number of books and documentaries that are still being done. Requests from the public for federal records were showing no sign of slowing and federal agencies were continuing to devote enormous resources to the task of responding to these requests and litigating many of the requests. That costs money. It also costs money to unnecessarily keep records classified. The Review Board will get as many records out in the public domain as possible in the next couple of years. In the long run, the Review Board will have saved a lot of money and resources.
3. The Review Board is prepared to begin the review of assassination records which the FBI, CIA and other federal agencies want to keep secret.
4. The Board has reviewed some Warren Commission documents that have not been made public and are not currently being reviewed by any other federal agency.
5. Members of the senior staff have reviewed documents of the House Select Committee on Assassination Records which were generated by the Committee and have remained secret, but do not require review by any other agencies.
6. The Board has published guidance on the definition of an "assassination record" in the Federal Register. There was a 30 day public comment period and we received input from a lot of different people. Our goal is to frame a definition which allows the American public to have as complete a record of the assassination as possible. The definition guidance will be finalized this spring.
7. The Board has also met with officials from the CIA, the Secret Service and the National Security Agency. The purpose of our meetings was to establish a relationship with federal agencies which hold assassination records and ensure that they are in compliance with the law.

IV. "Broader Implication" Talking Points

In addition to the talking points above, we have also used the following talking points previously to emphasize the broader implications of the Board's work:

1. The Act which created the Review Board has given the American public an extraordinary and unprecedented opportunity to gain insight into its government and recent history.

2. The Board has the opportunity not only to make publicly available records that may clarify the facts surrounding the assassination, but also, along the way, the opportunity to redefine the meaning of, and need for, secrecy in government.

3. The unprecedented powers given to an independent panel of private citizens will also hopefully help to restore a measure of confidence in government.

4. The controversy surrounding the Kennedy assassination is unlikely to disappear even after the Board's work is completed. But, the American public will know that no information about the assassination is being hidden by the government. Perhaps we will see a way for government business to be conducted more effectively -- and more openly -- in the future.

V. Statements We Have Learned to Avoid

Based on our experiences in dealing with the media in recent months, a couple of statements to avoid are suggested below.

1. "People are still asking questions about the Lincoln assassination."

Based on the reaction that we have heard, this statement leads people to question the reason for the Board's existence. They query: What is the point of having this Board if questions are still being asked about a presidential assassination which occurred more than 100 years ago? Although it puts the Board's task in some historical context, this statement is not viewed as a positive statement about the Board.

2. "There will always be more questions about the assassination, even after the Board is done with its work."

We have learned that this statement, standing alone, also leads people to question the need for the Review Board. As we are all aware, it *is* likely that there will always be questions about the assassination. However, people find it easier to accept the need for the Board when the above statement is accompanied with the following point, "When the Review Board has completed its work, the American public will know that the government is not hiding any information about the assassination."

VI. Responding to Questions About Who Was Responsible for the Assassination

When asked who he thinks was responsible for the assassination, Jack has responded in the following way:

I put myself in the category of most Americans, that is, I still have many questions about

what happened. I am keeping an open mind. The Review Board is not mandated to reach any conclusions about the assassination. We are charged with making the records which relate to the assassination public. Ultimately, it will be left to the American public to draw their own

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conclusions about what occurred 31 years ago in Dallas.

We have found that this is an effective way to maintain an unbiased public position, while taking the opportunity to restate the Board's mandate.