

Assassination Records Review Board

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(1) Page By Fax To: Dan Shaw

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Letter to the Editor

The Herald Star

401 Herald Square

Steubenville, OH 43952-2059

Attention: Dan Shaw

Letter to the Editor:

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to a Herald Star editorial ("JFK research will not end speculation;" March 8, 1995) and explain the importance and cost-effectiveness of the Assassination Records Review Board.

As you pointed out in your editorial, the federal government has previously dealt with the assassination of President Kennedy, and yet the public continues to question the facts of the assassination as well as the motives and action of its government. The demand for the complete opening of all relevant records continues unabated. As a result of this demand, and in an effort to create a responsible, cost effective, and efficient system for the release of these records, the Congress passed, and

President Bush signed, The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992. The Act mandated the creation of the Assassination Records Review Board. The Board was created, and later appointed by President Clinton, to oversee the identification and public release of records related to the assassination of President Kennedy.

The Senate report on the Act establishing the Review Board stated that "the underlying principles" guiding the legislation were "efficiency and cost effectiveness," as well as independence and public confidence in the identification and release of records related to the assassination of President Kennedy. The Review Board was created because of the failure of federal agencies to release records relating to the assassination in a timely manner. The Review Board is necessary to ensure the independent and enforceable mechanism for disclosure under uniform standards of review.

The Review Board structure established by Congress in the Act will achieve the cost effectiveness goal the Congress outlined by eliminating the need for agencies across the government to process future freedom of Information Act requests for these records and avoid the costly litigation that often results from these requests. In addition, another benefit flowing from the Act's stated presumption that all assassination records will be publicly disclosed is that the high cost to federal agencies of storing and protecting hundreds of thousands of documents that would remain unnecessarily classified will be eliminated.

Beyond the Review Board achieving its prescribed goals of efficiency and cost effectiveness, which it is uniquely situated to do, there is a far more important if less tangible benefit from the Review Board's operations. The disturbing phenomenon of public mistrust in our government began,

some argue, with the assassination of President Kennedy and its cloudy aftermath and is tied to the perception that the government is keeping important facts from the American people about the motives and actions of its institutions and personnel. A poll in late 1994 showed the percentage of Americans who "trust the government in Washington" has dropped from 76 percent in 1964, shortly after the death of President Kennedy, to 19 percent today.

The Assassination Records Review 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 reverse this trend of mistrust and redefine the meaning of, and need for, secrecy in government.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Samoluk, Esq.

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