

September 26, 1996

The Honorable Michael R. McNulty
2442 Rayburn Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative McNulty:

Thank you for your letter of September 19, 1996 regarding Mr. Joseph Backes and his contact with the Review Board. I appreciate the opportunity to set the record straight on this matter.

First, the Review Board has made a concerted effort to function as openly as possible. We have a large mailing list of interested parties throughout the country and keep them informed of all actions taken by the Board. In addition, we have conducted public hearings in Washington, Dallas, Boston, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. The Board has received thousands of suggestions and leads with regard to assassination records. Every letter we receive is carefully reviewed, and a response is sent.

To make for easier communications between the Board and the public, we have an Internet address and send and receive many messages electronically on a daily basis. The Chairman of the Board writes frequent guest pieces for various journals and has done interviews with the media on a national, state, and local level. The Review Board has taken seriously its obligation to be open, accessible, and responsive to the public.

Second, Mr. Joseph Backes has been in frequent communication with the Review Board. During our existence, he has communicated with us (via mail, fax, the Internet, Federal Express, telephone, and in person) approximately 100 times. As with all members of the public, we have responded to his requests in the most effective and efficient manner possible. When we were unable to meet his demands, we provided an explanation. In addition, as he himself stated, he has had the opportunity to address the Board twice at public hearings.

Third, Mr. Backes' specific complaints in connection with the Review Board's acquisition of a film containing outtakes from KTVT are without merit. In this instance, he was extended a courtesy that no other member of the public received. Mr. Backes made a special plea for a copy of the film in

connection with a presentation he was to make. The National Archives did not have the capability to respond quickly enough to meet his needs, and it was repeatedly explained to him that we did not have copies for distribution to the public. Nevertheless, to assist him, we sent him our file copy. Despite the courtesy extended to him, Mr. Backes initially refused to pay the Board the \$8.00 (our cost to make each videotape copy) that media outlets who received a copy of the film were charged. Subsequently, he has provided payment to the Board and will continue to receive information that we disseminate to individuals on our mailing list.

Finally, I understand that as public servants we are obligated to be responsive to members of the public, and the Board and staff have devoted significant resources to keep the public informed about our work. I am aware as well that we cannot satisfy everyone all of the time. It is, however, particularly disappointing when someone (to whom we have been particularly attentive and to whom we have extended a special courtesy) is unjustly critical of our efforts.

Again, thank you for writing and for the opportunity to explain the situation with Mr. Backes. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 724-0088, ext. 232, if you have any additional questions or comments.

Sincerely,

David G. Marwell
Executive Director