

## Memorandum

To: Jack Tunheim

From: Tom Samoluk/Eileen Sullivan

Date: November 14, 1996

Re: Updated Talking Points for Oprah

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### I. Introduction

This memorandum contains suggested talking points for Oprah . Several of them are basic ones which we have used in the past. Updated talking points have been added to reflect the Board's recent activities. I have provided information (news releases and news clips) about various document releases. This information is attached for your quick reference in preparation for the show. This memorandum contains more information than you will have the opportunity to use. Hopefully, it will give you the foundation to deal with whatever course the conversation takes during the show.

I have also included two other sections geared specifically for your appearance on Oprah. First, I have included a section on our contact with Marina Oswald. This includes a summary of what she has asked of us, as well as what we have asked of her, and the status of these respective requests. In addition, copies of her letters, our responses and her statement that was released at our Los Angeles hearing.

Second, there is a section on our contact with the LaFontaines and information about their book. The attachments include a review of the book by Joan Zimmerman.

### II. Appeal to the Public for Records

I suggest that given the large viewer audience for Oprah, we are unlikely to have the opportunity to make an appeal to the public that will reach so many people. Ideally, you will be able to work into your segment a request to the public to contact the Review Board if they have photographs, films or records related to the assassination. We will request of the producer that they put a graphic up on the screen with our name, address and telephone number:

**Assassination Records Review Board**  
600 E Street, N.W.  
Second Floor

Washington, D.C. 20530  
Telephone Number: (202) 724-0088

The appeal is reiterated later in this memo, but I thought it was important enough to mention it early in this memorandum.

### III. Basic Talking Points

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 33 years ago.
5. The Board is not re-investigating the assassination of President Kennedy. Our focus is collecting assassination records.
6. The Congress created the Board to have an independent, cost-effective and accountable process for the review and release of these documents.
7. 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. In fact, *The Washington Post* reported that the federal government spends an estimated \$16 billion a year to maintain a system of secrecy. The Review Board will continue to get as many records out in the public domain as possible in the next year. In the long run, the Review Board will have saved a lot of money and resources.

### IV. Recent Activities of the Review Board

1. The Review Board is deeply into the process of reviewing and releasing previously classified information. More than 5,000 documents have been released, in full or in part, under Board guidance. We meet regularly in Washington. The focus to date has been primarily on CIA and FBI documents, but we are also reviewing the records of other agencies. These decisions by the Board involve difficult issues related to informants and intelligences sources and methods. They are

sensitive issues and are important because of their relevancy to many other documents which the Board will be reviewing in the future.

2. Since July 1995, the Review Board has been releasing CIA documents, many of which had previously been available only in redacted form. These documents relate primarily to Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico City only weeks before the assassination. Most are now available to the American public in full. Some have a few redactions, but substantive information related to the assassination has been released.

[As an example, you could cite the CIA document which is the subject of the attached Associated Press story (**Attachment #1**) regarding the possible existence of another copy of an "intercept" of an Oswald telephone conversation with the Soviet embassy in Mexico City, which was discovered after the assassination. This is a good example of the Review Board and the JFK Act "in action" with the Board exercising its authority to release the substance of the relevant section of the document, while still protecting the actual text because of the sensitive information it contained about sources and methods. This is an important revelation because of all of the controversy surrounding Oswald's visit to Mexico City and theories that there was an imposter or that Oswald was accompanied by someone in Mexico City. Although we cannot say more, it is worth noting that the Board is pursuing the possible existence of another copy of the "intercept."

3. The Board has also been releasing FBI documents that are of great interest.

[An example of new information released by the Board in an FBI document is the Homer Echevarria memorandum which is the subject of the attached Associated Press story (**Attachment #2**). The Echevarria/Chicago anti-Castro lead was one that the Secret Service thought ought to have been followed by the FBI in 1963. However, the FBI did nothing. In the HSCA final report, the Committee agreed with the Secret Service and expressed deep concern that the FBI did not follow the Echevarria lead. In the document released by the Board, the public learns for the first time that Homer Echevarria's father was an FBI informant.]

[The release of the FBI/Swiss documents which is discussed in the attached news release (**Attachment #3**) and Reuters story (**Attachment #4**) demonstrate a number of points which are worth making:

- a. An important addition to the historical record has been made. It is important because there has been a lot written about Oswald's' pre-assassination travels.
- b. The records were aggressively pursued by Review Board.
- c. The FBI had initially taken an aggressive stance by appealing to the President and the Board had

to deal with that for the first time with this group of documents

d. The importance of having an independent body to pursue openness is demonstrated with this group of documents.

e. The records show the lengths that the FBI was going to three years before the assassination to find out what Oswald was doing and whether or not someone was posing as Oswald. He had the government's attention even at this point, three years before the assassination.

f. The American public now gets to see what has been withheld for 35 years.

g. In many instances blacked out documents lead to speculation. In this instance, we now know that the FBI was protecting a relationship with a foreign government.

h. The process worked. The Review Board got the records out and now the American public and historians can make their own judgments about how these documents fit into the assassination puzzle.]

4. As mentioned earlier, the Board has agreed with the CIA and the FBI that some information relating to sensitive intelligence sources and methods should not be publicly released at this time. We are exercising careful independent judgment, just as the Congress had envisioned. Consistent with the law, we are balancing the need to protect still sensitive government information versus the public's right to know.

5. It is worth noting that the Board has held public hearings on identifying and locating assassination records in New Orleans, Washington, Dallas, Boston and Los Angeles to allow for public input and assist the Board in fulfilling its mandate.

In connection with our public hearing in New Orleans, the Review Board obtained a significant number of original records related to the assassination investigation and prosecution of Clay Shaw by District Attorney Jim Garrison.

In connection with our recent hearing in Los Angeles, the family of the top attorney for the Warren Commission, the late J. Lee Rankin, agreed to donate his personal papers from the Warren Commission. Many of those have never been seen before and will add greatly to the record of the assassination. We are continuing to pursue additional records which should be in the Collection at the National Archives.

6. As many people probably saw last spring, the Review Board acquired a film from Janet Veazey,

a private citizen from Dallas, that consisted of outtakes taken by local television cameramen on the day of the assassination. Most of the film had never been seen by the public and it is now at the National Archives. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage other members of the public who may have original films, photographs or other records connected to the assassination to contact the Review Board. Individuals may have very valuable photographs or other materials in an old shoe box in the attic that may not be in the Collection at the National Archives and may prove to be very important.

7. I recently traveled to Moscow and Minsk with Board member Dr. Kermit Hall and our Executive Director David Marwell to deal with authorities there on records of Oswald's visit when he defected to the Soviet Union in 1959. With our visit we have opened up serious discussions and hope that we get records that will shed more light on those years.

Interestingly, as a footnote, we visited the apartment where Lee and Marina lived in Minsk.

I think our efforts demonstrate that we are being aggressive in using the authority granted to us under the law to seek relevant records wherever they may be located.

#### **IV. "Broader Implication" Talking Points**

The following points may help put the Board in some context:

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. Hopefully, the unprecedented powers given to an independent panel of citizens will 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. Review Board Contacts With Marina

As you are aware, Marina has written to us on several occasions. Copies of all of her correspondence and our responses in chronological order are attached.

She first wrote to us on June 1, 1995 regarding researcher Tom Wilson who has done work on the photographic evidence. Marina requested permission for Wilson to see the autopsy photographs. We wrote back to her advising her that it was not an issue for us.

Marina next wrote to us on April 19, 1996 regarding follow-up that she wanted to see done by the Board on various records that the LaFontaine's had talked about in their book. We responded on April 24, 1996 and stated that we were pursuing many of the potential sources of records mentioned in the book. We also noted that the FBI had denied that certain events had occurred regarding meetings between Oswald and an FBI agent, for example. Thus, the Bureau said no records that the LaFontaines discuss exist.

On May 31, 1996, we initiated contact with Marina on another matter. We asked for her written consent to get access to Lee Harvey Oswald's IRS records. There has also been contact with her over the telephone. On September 9, 1996, Jeremy wrote to her again about getting her consent for the Board to get the IRS records. She has yet to give her consent.

On September 17, 1996, at the Los Angeles hearing, witness Eric Hamburg introduced into the record a statement from Marina. In it she stated that she has received a "cold" reply from the Board regarding her request for records related to the LaFontaines' theory. Marina stated that she has not signed the waiver because that should not be the priority of the Board; the Board should focus on what she has emphasized.

On October 11, 1996, Marina returned to the Tom Wilson issue by co-signing a letter from Wilson. Attached to their letter is an appeal to President Clinton to arrange a meeting with Attorney General Reno, along with the Board, to present his findings. On October 31, 1996, Jeremy responded, following a telephone conversation between Tom Wilson and Doug, and stated that we would be happy to hear a presentation of his findings. On November 8, 1996, Wilson wrote back (with Marina as a co-signer) saying thank you for the offer, but they are going through the Justice Department for now. They welcome the offer of a Board representative attending a meeting with the Justice Department.

## **VI. Contact with the LaFontaines**

Our contact with the LaFontaines has been limited. They have used Marina to state what they want from the Board as far as records they claim exist and relate to their theory. Thus, suggested responses in the section below apply to points that could be made by either Mary LaFontaine or Marina.

Attached for your information is a book review that Joan Zimmerman did on "Oswald Talked." It should give you a helpful sense of their theory and some of the problems with the book.

## **VII. Suggested Responses to Points Made By LaFontaine and Oswald**

As we have discussed, we do not want you to get into a debate with the other guests. If they claim that we have not done what they want the Board to do, you should "stay above the fray" and respond with some of the suggestions made below.

1. We want the same things that Marina and the LaFontaines want: the truth. We agree: the record should be made available to the American public. That is why we have been working hard at it for two years and will continue our efforts in the coming year.
2. We have not made judgments on particular theories. That is not the Board's job and it would be inappropriate to do so.
3. In fact, we are pursuing many avenues related to records that the LaFontaines and Marina have talked about. Many of our efforts are ongoing and everything we do will eventually be made public.
4. For example, this week we are interviewing former FBI special agent James Hosty who interviewed Marina before the assassination and was assigned to Oswald. We have already interviewed former Military Intelligence Officer Ed Coyle who is mentioned in the LaFontaines' book. We are reaching out to people and being very aggressive in seeking out records.
5. In addition, we are pursuing records with the Criminal Investigations Division at the Army and other agencies that allegedly relate to gunrunning in 1963. These efforts are ongoing and the results will be made public at the appropriate point.

If the other guests get aggressive and Oprah lets them go a little, I would make these points:

1. As I stated there is overwhelming interest in the assassination and we have received thousands of leads and suggestions about the location and existence of assassination records. We are doing our best to process all of this information in an effective and efficient manner.

2. For Marina (if needed): We need the cooperation of government agencies and individuals. We have a request in to Marina, which she is considering, to sign a waiver that will allow us to get Lee Harvey Oswald's tax records. This is information that could shed light on certain matters (Jack - the point here is that there have been allegations that Oswald was a paid informant. Thus, the question is would his tax returns reveal any income that is not otherwise accounted for). We hope that Marina and others will give us their cooperation so we can make the record as complete as possible for the American public.