

Assassination Records Review Board

The Assassination Records Review Board recommends that the JFK Act be extended for one additional year. Although it has accomplished much in its first two years, the Review Board still has a great deal of important work to do. The additional year will allow the Review Board to review and release the remaining secret assassination records to the public and to complete a final report.

Accomplishments of the Review Board

Through October 1996, the Review Board acted to transfer nearly 10,000 documents to the National Archives and Records Administration for inclusion in the JFK Collection. At the end of 1996, that collection totaled approximately 3.1 million pages and was used extensively by researchers from all over the United States .

Government Records related to the Assassination — By the end of this year, the Review Board will have reviewed and processed nearly all of the assassination records that have been identified by Federal agencies, with the important exception of the FBI and the CIA. The overwhelming majority of previously redacted information will have been made public.

These records include:

- thousands of CIA documents on Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of President Kennedy that make up the CIA's Oswald File
- thousands of once-secret records from the investigation of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, including the controversial Staff Report on Oswald and Mexico City
- thousands of records from the FBI's core and related assassination files
- the original Marine Corps personnel file on Oswald

Private and Local Records — The Board has identified and secured significant assassination-related records in the hands of private citizens and local governments, including copies of the official records of District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of the assassination, the personal papers of Warren Commission Chief Counsel J. Lee Rankin, as well as long-lost films taken in Dallas on November 22, 1963 that the public had never seen and that shed new light on the events of that day.

The Review Board Needs Additional Time

The Review Board will not be able to complete its work within the original three-year timetable set by Congress for the following reasons:

Unrealistic Time Limit —The authors of the legislation believed that the task would take three years. That estimate was based on the best available information at the time, but the legislation established an unprecedented process. There was no way of knowing the problems of scale and complexity that the Board has encountered, nor was there any way to factor in the comprehensive approach taken by the Board in fulfilling its mandate.

Delay in the appointment of the Board — The Board was not appointed until 18 months after the legislation was signed into law. Federal agencies had to define for themselves the universe of records that should be processed under the Act and to speculate about the kind of evidence that would be needed to sustain the redaction of assassination-related information. Once the Board was in place, agencies needed to revise a considerable amount of work. In fact, many agencies have yet to complete their review and the Board is still seeking their compliance.

Protracted Start-up — Congress imposed several restrictions on the manner in which the Board could operate. Unlike other temporary agencies, the Board could not hire or detail experienced federal employees, but rather had to hire new employees who had to undergo background investigations and be cleared at the Top Secret level. Locating and renovating space that was suitable for the storage of classified materials was required. As a result, the Board could not begin an effective review of records until the third quarter of its first year.

The Job Ahead

An additional year will permit the Review Board to finish its task by completing the following:

Sequestered Collections — Additional time will permit the Board to complete its review of the huge and critically important collections of records at the CIA and FBI that were requested by the HSCA in the course of their investigation.

The Records of Some Agencies and Congressional Committees — Additional time will allow the Board to finish its work with several agencies and Congressional Committees (NSA, Secret Service, Senate Intelligence Committee).

Search for Additional Records — Additional time will permit the Board's search for additional records held by government agencies, private individuals, and local governments to be concluded with greater confidence. Some of these records have been identified, but not yet acquired by the Board.

Foreign Records — The Board has started the process of collecting and reviewing records held by a number of foreign countries (Russia, Belarus, Mexico, England, Germany, France, Japan, Cuba). Contact has been made with several countries. Additional time will increase the likelihood of success.

The Cost

As a result of the Board's necessarily protracted start-up, it has a budget carryover of \$500,000 in no-year funds from its first year, a sum that would fund a full quarter of continued operation. The Board would consequently require \$1.6 million of additional funds to operate for one more year. In considering this cost, it is important to assess the cost of not completing the job.

The Review Board was conceived of as a means of eliminating uncertainty and speculation about the contents of government files relating to the assassination of President Kennedy. A premature termination of the Review Board would surely generate intensified doubts within the general public about the commitment of Congress to release all information that relates to the assassination of President Kennedy, as well as renewed speculation about the conduct of our government and its institutions and personnel. If appropriate closure is not reached now, the identical issues will have to be addressed again in the future—at even greater cost. The recommended additional year will allow for a confident conclusion of this important task.