

April 23, 1996

Dear Interested Parties:

The Assassination Records Review Board has voted to release more than 1,300 JFK assassination records, in full or in part, since June 1995. In addition, the CIA and the FBI are releasing more than 1,200 additional documents on their own based on the standards set by the Review Board. As a result, a significant body of previously withheld information has been made available to the American public.

Each time the Review Board makes a decision, it weighs the public's interest in the record, the statutory presumption favoring release, and the specific grounds for which a record might continue to be postponed under the JFK Act. The Board is making unprecedented decisions about disclosing information that has always been kept secret by the intelligence community. There is no comparable effort in American history involving an independent board deciding what should be made available to the public.

I want to take this opportunity to inform you of the action taken by the Review Board on a small number of CIA documents. The Board recently reconsidered 51 documents that we had originally voted to release in part (28 from the January 31, 1996 meeting, 21 from the January 5, 1996 meeting, 1 from the December 13, 1995 meeting, and 1 from the November 14, 1995 meeting). The CIA presented additional evidence to the Board on these documents. Based on this additional evidence, the Board voted to reconsider these documents at its March 19, 1996 meeting. The various issues in these documents were: disclosure of the originators of cables, the release of cryptonyms, the protection of the names of CIA employees or information about other individuals. In all of these documents, the Board voted to use its authority under the JFK Act to use substitute language, while protecting the actual text of that part of the document. These documents are now publicly available at the National Archives. In the past, the use of substitute language by the Board has proven to be an effective means to balance the need to protect certain intelligence information and the responsibility to disclose as much information as possible.

There is also a small number of FBI documents on which I wanted to provide an update. The Board recently reconsidered 24 FBI documents it had originally voted on at its January 31, 1996 meeting. After receiving additional information from the FBI, the Board voted on these documents again on

March 19, 1996. The issue is the protection of confidential relationships in 21 of the documents. Based on the additional evidence, the Board decided to open these documents on August 1, 1996. The issue in the three other documents was the protection of informants names. Based on the additional evidence, the Board decided to release this information in ten years.

The other members of the Board and I have made it clear to the FBI and the CIA that for the Review Board to be effective and make informed decisions, consistent with the provisions of the JFK Act, evidence supporting the postponement of the release of information must be provided in a timely manner. Both the FBI and the CIA have pledged that they will provide relevant information in a more timely fashion in the future, so the Review Board will not be put in the position of having to reconsider documents.

Please be assured that we are committed to keeping you informed about our actions and some of the difficult issues with which we are dealing. We continue to work hard to achieve the proper balance intended by the United States Congress between the statutory presumption favoring disclosure and the protection of intelligence sources and methods, when appropriate.

Sincerely,

John R. Tunheim
Chairman