

October 31, 1997

The Honorable Dan Burton
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter is the Assassination Records Review Board's third monthly progress report, submission of which was required in the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight report on H.R. 1553 (now P.L. 105-25) that extended the authorization of the Review Board until September 30, 1998. I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with some additional information regarding the Board's progress since our last report.

At an October 14 closed meeting, the Board processed nearly 1,000 CIA records and nearly 1,600 FBI records for public release. In addition, the Review Board has also processed more than 130 previously classified military records that will be made part of the JFK Collection and available to the public for the first time.

Since our September report, the Board's FBI team has reviewed an additional 35,000 pages of records from the FBI's House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) files. Many of these records relate to organized crime figures, anti-Castro Cubans, and some former CIA personnel that will enrich the history surrounding the assassination.

The Board's CIA team continues to grapple with some of the most difficult issues as we enter our last year. For example, the Board members and staff continue to process records that contain the names of former CIA personnel. The agency is most protective of the names of individuals who were employees and might be in danger of personal harm were their names to be disclosed. This situation has required more research by our staff and the presentation of additional evidence by the CIA to ensure that careful decisions are being made by the Board within the parameters of the JFK Act.

As has been previously reported to the Committee, the new system put in place by the Board to quicken the pace of records review in our last year has shown very positive results. We have received excellent cooperation from the CIA and the FBI, the two agencies that hold the most assassination records. However, the Board has recently advised both agencies in writing that although many important strides have been made to further our goals, we nevertheless perceive that the pace of review and declassification of records will need to be accelerated in order for the Review Board to succeed. We have reminded the agencies that the goal includes reviewing, processing and transferring to the custody of the National Archives all identified assassination records by September 1, 1998. Both the CIA and the FBI have been advised that it is our firm intention to complete our task within the congressionally mandated time limit. The Board members are confident that the cooperative relationship that we have established with the agencies will form the foundation for a successful completion of our mandate.

The Board's federal agencies compliance program continues to be a major focus of our attention. As stated in our August report, the Board has received final compliance statements from a number of agencies and we continue to evaluate those statements. In addition, we have recently received final compliance statements from the Civil Division of the Department of Justice. Some agencies have sought additional time to prepare and submit their final compliance statements. Thus, before the end of the year we expect to receive final compliance statements from the Department of State, the Office for the Secretary of Defense, the Navy (including the Marines), the Air Force, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Leadership Offices for the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, and the Social Security Administration.

We are also currently working with various Congressional committees and the National Archives and Records Administration to ensure that all relevant committee records are identified and placed in the JFK Collection. Although we have received assurances from relevant Congressional committees that they will process their own assassination records, the results have thus far been less than ideal.

Finally, I would like to provide you with an update regarding the status of the original Zapruder film, a matter that the Board addressed at a public hearing and a public meeting earlier this year. As you may recall, on April 24, 1997, consistent with the JFK Act, the Review Board voted unanimously to direct that the film be transferred on August 1, 1998 to the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection at the National Archives and Records Administration. Since that time, the Department of Justice has handled the matter and the Review Board has not been directly involved. Mr. Kirk T. Manhardt, Assistant Director of the Commercial Litigation Branch, has been involved in

negotiations with the Zapruder family and their legal representatives. The Board is unaware of any significant developments resulting from those negotiations to date.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to keep you informed of our progress each month. Please do not hesitate to have a member of your staff contact me if you have any comments or questions. I can be reached at 724-0088, ext. 226.

Sincerely,

T. Jeremy Gunn
Executive Director