

April 29, 1998

The Honorable Arlen Specter
711 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide you with an update on the activities of the Review Board. As you are aware, we have five months remaining to fulfill our mandate, and I am proud to report that we are on schedule. The Board looks forward to completing successfully our mission and submitting our final report to the Congress, the President, and the American people.

To date the Review Board has processed for release over 37,000 assassination-related records. After streamlining the review process, the Board continues to release larger volumes of records at each meeting. Our staff has been hard-working and exceptional in its devotion to our mandate.

We continue to dedicate our resources to completing the review of the "sequestered collections" held by the CIA and the FBI. The ARRB tackled difficult issues early on in our tenure, paving the way for the automatic release of documents with the same issues later on. 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. This goal includes reviewing, processing, and transferring to the custody of the National Archives all identified assassination records by September 30, 1998. 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.

This year we have also focused our efforts on releasing military records related to the assassination. The Board has held successful joint declassification sessions with agencies including the Department of the Army, the State Department, National Security Council, Joint Staff Secretariat, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to declassify thousands of military records in which these agencies have equities. Many of these records, although not directly related to the assassination of President Kennedy, have enhanced the historical record surrounding the assassination. The Board's broad definition of an "assassination record" has helped ensure that the record is as complete as possible.

On July 3, 1997, President Clinton signed a bill (H.R. 1553) into law that extended the authorization of the Review Board until September 30, 1998. With this extension, the Board will be able to submit a more complete final report and ensure federal agency compliance. We are in the process of

obtaining from all relevant agencies their declarations, made under penalty of perjury, certifying that they have made diligent efforts to search for and identify any assassination-related records within their custody. It is then ultimately left to the discretion of the Review Board to determine if an agency has in fact complied with the JFK Act.

At the end of 1997, the Board received from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence the unredacted Church Committee records that had previously been forwarded to NARA in redacted form.

Receipt of these records is the result of a long-standing request from the Review Board and will require intense staff work to process them for Board review and public release.

In the past year, we have received important donations to the JFK Collection from private citizens. As you may recall, the Collection was enhanced by the inclusion of Clay Shaw's personal papers, the papers of former Warren Commission General Counsel J. Lee Rankin, the notes allegedly taken by J.W. "Will" Fritz during his interrogation of Lee Harvey Oswald, and the AP wire copy of the events of November 22 through November 26, 1963. We are pleased to have these valuable additions to the ever-growing JFK Collection, and we are grateful to the donors who responded to our call for records.

I would like to thank the members of the research community for their continued support over the years. We have always appreciated the input and suggestions you have provided to the Board. Frequent contact with members of the public has been an important component of our efforts.

Your input will be evident in the final product -- a more complete JFK Assassination Records Collection. The Review Board has spent that last few years meeting on a frequent basis to release documents, while at the same time working to achieve the proper balance between the statutory presumption favoring disclosure and the protection of national security issues. We have attempted to diligently follow the Congressional mandate in the JFK Act. It is our hope that, in the meantime, the Review Board has made an important contribution to a restoration of public confidence in government.

Sincerely,

John R. Tunheim
Chair