



Nation

Assassination board takes

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WASHINGTON — Many assassination researchers and conspiracy theorists could hardly believe their ears Tuesday.

The Assassination Records Review Board — an official federal agency holding its first public hearing — was treating about 150 of them with respect, sincerity, and even collegiality.

For serious folks used to being categorized generally by the federal government as paranoid nuts and wackos, it was a huge change.

“We are all on the same side,” assured Henry Graff, an eminent Columbia University historian and member of the five-member board. “The bias of this board is in favor of full disclosure.”

The newly appointed review

board was created by 1992 legislation to play traffic cop and referee in the continuing request for documents and other records related to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The board has surprisingly broad powers to rule on just what gets released and what doesn't, and with the exception of presidential intervention, is the final arbiter on most rulings. It also has subpoena powers. Its Tuesday hearing in the National Archives here was held to solicit views on just what exactly an “assassination record” is.

This is important since the board also rules on requests by various government agencies — mainly the CIA and FBI — to postpone release of documents that Congress ordered to be made public in the John F. Ken-

edy Assassination Records Collection Act.

“The board seems to be taking its role seriously, and is treating researchers fairly and openly,” said John Judge, executive secretary for the Coalition on Political Assassinations, an umbrella group of conspiracy theorists organized last spring.

James Lesar, a Washington lawyer and one of the early researchers who organized the much-used private Assassinations Archives and Research Center here, said many JFK conspiracy investigators “have become somewhat jaundiced over the years” toward government officials and find it refreshing that the review board “is taking its responsibility seriously.”

Most JFK conspiracy theorists

JFK theorists seriously

have three things in common: They don't believe the Warren Commission, which three decades ago this autumn concluded malcontent Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone shooter; they believe the federal government worked feverishly to cover up the real killer or killers; they believe federal intelligence agencies are still withholding critical information.

“We hear frequently that the trust of the American people in their institutions is at an all-time low,” Lesar told the review board. “I believe this precipitous decline in trust began with the Kennedy assassination, and is not likely to be reversed any time soon unless — at long last — the controversies engendered by that assassination are dealt with directly, with full disclosure of

all relevant facts. . . .”

Several prominent authors and historians testified that the CIA and FBI in particular have finally started opening up files in response to the 1992 legislation. But they cautioned that many relevant documents are still smothered.

Lesar, for instance, noted that the two agencies made more than 650,000 pages of material available to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in the late 1970s, but now are contending many of these are irrelevant to the JFK records release.

“This is unacceptable,” said Lesar, who believes the FBI reluctance “relates to its fear of disclosing organized crime records.”

John Newman, a University of Maryland professor, JFK assassi-

nation author, and former Army intelligence officer, said that while the FBI and CIA are “moving forward” with document release, the National Security Agency continues to deny to researchers it even has any JFK-related documents. This despite the fact the agency recently asked the review board to delete as JFK material several assassination-related documents it had turned over in 1975 to the famous Church Committee, a Senate panel that looked into rogue intelligence activities.

Despite the CIA's denial for decades that it had any special interest in ex-Marine Oswald (a U-2 spy plane specialist who defected to the Soviet Union), Oswald's name was on the interception list, which the CIA refuses to further describe.