

House Resolution 160

For background information concerning the Resolution to provide for accelerated release of House Select Committee On Assassinations records, the following issues discussion draft is provided for your reference and comment. For further information, write Kevin Walsh at P.O. Box 9032, Washington, D.C. 20003, or phone Mark Allen at 653-5147.

1. Q. What good is it to go back into these issues? (i.e., assassination of J. F. K. and M. L. K.)
 - A. This resolution does not reopen the investigations but simply permits the House to make available historically significant documents compiled at public expense in service of the public's need to know the facts as they were best determined.
2. Q. Haven't we already spent enough on this?
 - A. The resolution calls for no additional expenditures. Staff at the National Archives already review congressional records. The resolution will simply allow for the records of the HSCA to receive priority review and release.
3. Q. Won't release of these records needlessly embarrass some innocent individuals?
 - A. The resolution specifically excludes just this.
4. Q. What about agreements of confidentiality provided by the Select Committee to witnesses?
 - A. These are honored by the resolution specifically.
5. Q. Aren't a lot of these documents classified?
 - A. Although some documents are classified, the guidelines applied by this resolution protect against unwarranted disclosures.
6. Q. Won't this release such things as the electronic surveillance tapes of Dr. King compiled by F.B.I. Director Hoover?
 - A. No. This material is sealed under court order. Additionally, the guidelines would exempt them from release.
7. Q. Isn't former Chairman Louis Stokes opposed to this?
 - A. No. His position is that in his role as Committee Chairman, he was constrained to follow advice of counsel regarding the traditional 50-year embargo. He now believes that the effort by former H.S.C.A. members to suspend the embargo should be allowed consideration by the Resolution process.

8. Q. Wasn't a lot of that material sensitive and irrelevant?
- A. No. That small percentage which is will be methodically screened out by using the guidelines which have been proven effective with the Warren Commission records. The Warren records were more sensitive due to the relative newness of events. This process is a road we've been down before, and safely.
9. Q. Won't this endanger the deliberative process? A. No, the resolution specifically excludes those executive session which the committee deemed inappropriate for the public record.
10. Q. If this is an issue, how come there is so little interest by constituents?
- A. The general public is unaware of the 50-year embargo. With the 20th anniversary on November 22, there will be several major media specials and this 50-year withholding will become an issue.
11. Q. Wasn't the publication of a Report and supporting volumes enough?
- A. No. H.S.C.A. members intended all along to release many unpublished records, just the Warren Commission, C.I.A. and F.B.I. did. They simply ran out of time and funding.
12. Q. Why should the House make an exception to its rules on this issue?
- A. This would not be an exception to a rule. The 50-year period is a tradition dating back to 1953 when the House first provided for public access to its working records.

This resolution accelerates release already mandated so that the House of Representatives will be in line with all other government agencies which recognized the need to release information as it was best determined during out lifetimes.

The records of the Warren Commission were originally slated for release in the year 2039. In response to public concern, the Executive Branch released 90% of the Warren records pursuant to "an overriding policy for the fullest disclosure possible."

This will not set a precedent. The resolution limits action to this unique circumstance. The Executive Branch did just this in 1965 and no damage or precedent resulted.

The House of Representatives is by nature a flexible institution. Its way of doing business can be adjusted to unique circumstances. In the opinion of the Select Committee members who know the records, this release is both appropriate and in the public interest.