

JFK panel, in Boston, hears

By Doris Sue Wong
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The head of a board set up to lease government documents relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy said yesterday the 6 million fact-finding effort will debunk many conspiracy theories but probably spawn some new ones.

John Tunheim, chairman of the Assassination Records Review Board, predicted at a state House hearing that by the time the board completes its work in October 1997, more than 2 million documents relating to the assassination would be available for public review at the National Archives, in addition to the 2 million already there.

Despite the avalanche of material, panel members said the doubts that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone would probably continue to linger.

Even so, Tunheim defended the effort. "I think we are a very cost-effective way of doing this" when compared to "the cost of agencies responding to Freedom of Information requests and defending themselves in lawsuits from people who want to get at this information," he said. "I think there are issues for the American public that do need to be resolved."

Panel member Kermit Hall, who noted that controversy continues to swirl over whether John Wilkes Booth killed President Lincoln more than a century ago, said, "Basically, the conspiracy theorist will always be able to find questions to ask that cannot be immediately answered."

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KERMIT HALL
Panel member

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from conspiracy buffs

A half-dozen academics, authors and researchers — whose theses ranged from Lee Harvey Oswald was framed to Oswald did not act alone in the assassination — spent three hours suggesting to the board what documents they should look for, where and why, with the latter of the three not always clear.

Philip H. Melanson, political science professor at UMass-Dartmouth and author of "Spy ga: Lee Harvey Oswald and US Intelligence," asked the board to release military intelligence records on Oswald. Other witnesses urged the five-member board to issue reports that the windshield of the convertible in which Kennedy was riding in Dallas was switched after

being pierced by a bullet and that Kennedy's gunshot wounds were altered as part of a cover-up.

Momentum for creating the board increased following the release of Oliver Stone's 1991 film "JFK," which suggested that responsibility for the Kennedy assassination lay with a broad-based conspiracy involving the FBI, the CIA and military intelligence. According to Hall, surveys showed that before the film came out, 80 percent of American people believed the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone in the assassination. Following the film's release, 80 percent believed there was a conspiracy.

Public outcry from the film provided the impetus for Congress and President Clinton to pass the 1992 law calling for the release of relevant information.

The session at the State House yesterday was part of a series of meetings the committee is having with conspiracy buffs and academics in cities across the country.