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JFK: THE FILES

A House subcommittee unanimously approved legislation last week to unseal government records dealing with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The bill would set up a judicially appointed citizens review board to examine all the secret government material on the assassination and recommend which items should be released. The Bush administration has objected to the proposed review process as an unconstitutional infringement on executive powers and has suggested that the president could withhold documents on national security or privacy grounds. Last week's action moves the full measure to the House Judiciary Committee, one of three panels that must approve the bill before it is sent to the House floor.

The mountain of material, held by Congress, federal agencies, libraries and archives, contains everything from autopsy photographs and top-secret intelligence reports to newspaper clippings and tax returns. What follows is an outline of material related to the assassination that is held by government agencies:

The Warren Commission. Officially, the Committee to Investigate the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy.
Quantity: 363 cubic feet of material.
Location: National Archives, Washington.
Status: 98 percent available to the public.
Comments: Commission concluded in 1964 that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

The Rockefeller Commission. Officially, the Commission to Investigate CIA Activities Within the United States.
Quantity: 2,500 pages of material on JFK assassination.
Location: National Archives and Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.
Status: Highly classified, official government access only.
Comments: File includes material on plots to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Commission concluded in 1975 that Kennedy was shot from the rear, rejecting allegations that CIA agents were linked with Oswald and Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby. The Ford Library is assisting scholars in requesting government agency permission for its release.

The Church Committee. Officially, the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities.
Quantity: About 5,000 papers on Kennedy assassination.
Location: Senate Intelligence Committee.
Status: Classified.
Comments: Committee reported in 1976 that the CIA and the FBI "failed in, or avoided, carrying out certain of their responsibilities" in the JFK probe. But the committee said its finding "does not lead to the conclusion that there was a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy."

The House Select Committee on Assassinations.
Quantity: A one-volume report; 12 supporting volumes; 414,000 pages of unpublished material.
Location: National Archives.
Status: Report and supporting volumes publicly available. Unpublished material secret until 2029.
Comments: The committee reported in 1979 that a second gunman probably fired and missed Kennedy. Historian Dick Billings, who served on the committee and drafted the report, said most of the important material was published in the supporting volumes. Material held until 2029 includes autopsy photos and X-rays, personal income tax returns, committee housekeeping records and material protected under national security concerns. The 2029 date stems from a House rule that seals all unpublished committee records for 50 years.



Federal Bureau of Investigation.
Quantity: 499,431 pages of documents.
Location: FBI public reading room, headquarters, Washington.
Status: 223,689 pages or 93 feet of material available to the

public. Agency is processing more files for release. There are about 22,056 pages of files on related people such as Oswald's wife, Marina. Of that total, 5,029 pages have been made public.

Comments: Unlike most other sources, the FBI's JFK file continues to grow. The FBI recently interviewed two "hobos" arrested in Dealey Plaza and believed by some to have been assassins. The FBI concluded the two were, in fact, hobos and not involved. A third hobo was found to have died. The FBI also recently pursued and dismissed a tip that Oswald had been seen with Ruby before the assassination. The FBI is withholding some material to protect intelligence sources or personal privacy.



Central Intelligence Agency.
Quantity: About 250,000 to 300,000 pages.
Location: CIA headquarters, Langley, Va.
Status: About 11,000 pages made public through Freedom of Information Act requests.
Comments: The agency has established an internal historical review board to examine JFK documents and release all but those protected by national security or privacy considerations.

Secret Service Records.
Quantity: 11,000 pages of documents and several audiovisual items.
Location: National Archives.
Status: Access governed by Freedom of Information Act.
Comments: Although researchers must file FOIA petitions to view the Secret Service file, most of the material is publicly available through the Warren Commission files. Scattered documents have been withheld under FOIA exemptions dealing with national security, personal privacy and law enforcement records.

Department of Justice, Criminal Division case file.
Quantity: 65,000 pages.
Location: National Archives.
Status: Access governed by Freedom of Information Act; 11,000 pages withheld under exemptions dealing with personal privacy and law enforcement records.
Comments: The department is leading the Bush administration's opposition to legislation creating a citizens review board to release assassination documents. The Justice Department argues that the bill infringes on the president's power to control executive branch documents.

State Department.
Quantity: 7,000 pages.
Location: Most transferred from State to National Archives.
Status: Access governed by Freedom of Information Act.
Comments: Most material available through Warren Commission report.

—Associated Press

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