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Administration releases declassified Oswald file

By John Aloysius Farrell
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WASHINGTON — The Bush administration retreated Tuesday from its previous opposition to the release of U.S. government files on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and made public 123 pages of declassified CIA documents on Lee Harvey Oswald as a sign of its good faith.

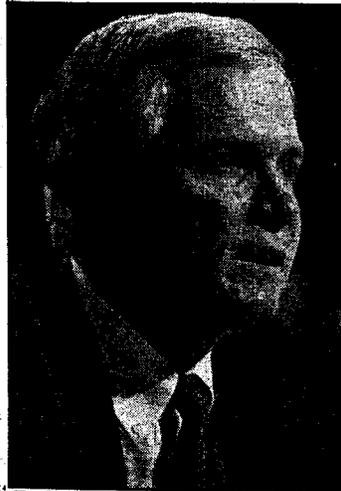
The CIA file contained few surprises and a significant deletion, however, and members of a Senate panel voiced their suspicion that the White House was launching a public relations campaign to subvert congressional efforts to mandate full disclosure.

Delivering the first CIA assassination file to the Senate Government Affairs Committee, Robert Gates, the director of Central Intelligence, spoke in a voice breaking with apparent emotion as he described how Kennedy's call to public service had inspired him as a college student in the early 1960s, and how he had traveled to Washington to watch the president's funeral cortege.

"The only thing more horrifying to me than the assassination itself is the insidious, perverse notion that elements of the American government — that my own agency — had some part in it," Gates said. "I am determined personally to make public or to expose to disinterested eyes every relevant scrap of paper in CIA's possession in the hope of helping to dispel this corrosive suspicion. . . . I believe I owe that to his memory."

Gates described the 123 pages that the CIA transferred to the committee and the National Archives as "a copy of Oswald's file as it existed before the assassination" at agency headquarters.

Though Gates told the committee that the file was being opened with "quite minimal deletions," the one obvious deletion regards a highly controversial matter: a de-



Robert Gates
Hopes to dispel suspicion

scription of a man in a photograph taken by the CIA who was said to have identified himself as Oswald at the Soviet embassy and Cuban consulate in Mexico City.

Though their views were not adopted by the panel, staff members of the House Assassinations Committee concluded in 1979 that Oswald may have been impersonated in Mexico City, and the CIA photograph and description of the man identified as Oswald were at the core of such suspicions.

The meager CIA file, a copy of which was made available to *The Boston Globe*, portrays a sluggish U.S. foreign policy, intelligence and law enforcement bureaucracy that — at the peak of Cold War tensions — inexplicably allowed Oswald, a self-proclaimed traitor who had promised to give secrets to the Soviets, back in the United States with ease.

The government agencies did so despite an inquiry from the White House about the possibility that Oswald, and other defectors, could be used for counterintelligence or other Soviet purposes.

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