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February 28, 1984

The Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins  
Chairman, Committee on House Administration  
2371 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Hawkins:

Tomorrow the Committee on House Administration will again consider H.R. 160, a resolution to permit the National Archives to make public the non-sensitive records of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. I believe this resolution warrants your full support.

H.R. 160 presents Congress with the same issue which confronted the Executive Branch in 1965 when the National Archives announced that it would follow its normal rule and keep Warren Commission records secret for 75 years. Citizen protest, exemplified by the attached letter from the mayor of Cedar Rapids to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, caused the Johnson Administration to make an exception to the 75-year rule and to instruct the Archivist to release the Commission's papers under careful guidelines.

Using these guidelines, the same guidelines which H.R. 160 would have the Archivist apply to the records of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, the Archives has now made public approximately 90 percent of the Warren Commission's papers. There has been no claim that these releases have damaged the national security, jeopardized confidential informants or defamed innocent persons. They have, however, greatly enriched the fund of public knowledge concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and its investigation.

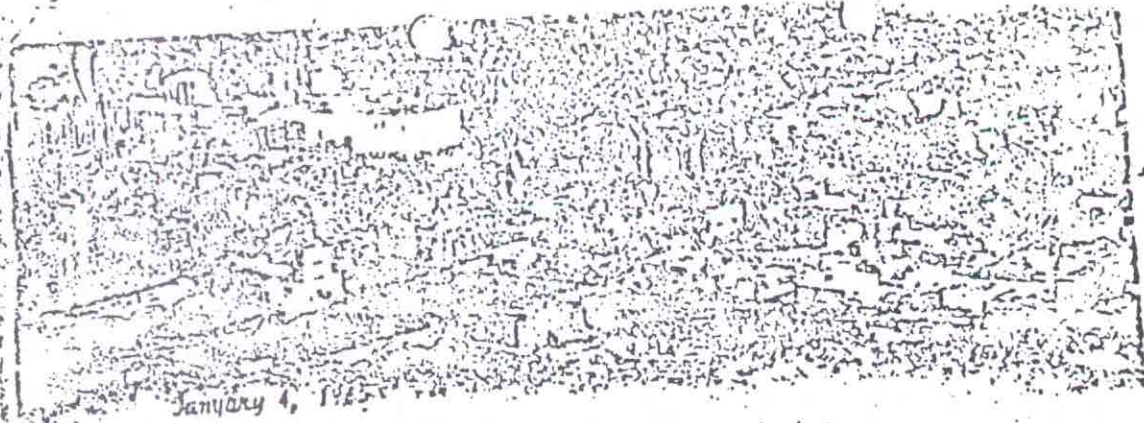
In responding to the Attorney General's inquiry regarding the accessibility of Warren Commission records, Chief Justice Earl Warren stated that the Commission assumed that determinations as to their release "would be made in recognition of the overriding consideration of the fullest possible disclosure. . . ." See attached April 5, 1965 letter from Chief Justice Earl Warren to Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach.

The controversy over the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has been unique and unprecedented in our history. A 50-year rule of secrecy by Congress is no more warranted under these exceptional circumstances than was the 75-year rule which the National Archives initially sought to impose upon Warren Commission records.

I urge you to follow the example set by the Warren Commission  
by voting in favor of H.R. 160.

Sincerely yours,

*James H. Lesar*  
James H. Lesar



January 4, 1964

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Mr. President:

As one who read and believed the Warren Report on the assassination of President Kennedy I am disturbed and chagrined that you would permit a government agency to dictate to you what will be done with testimony and exhibits for the next 75 years.

Knowing that you believe in the public's right to know - a statement you have often made - it intrigues me that you would permit a 75 year cloak of secrecy to fall over the facts involved in the Kennedy assassination.

The decision of the National Archives Bureau to withhold from the public "off the record testimony and exhibits of the Warren Commission for 75 years" is inexplicable and inexcusable and gives cause to doubt the veracity of the published Warren Commission report.

I believe in national security but I fail to see the relationship between the facts of the Kennedy assassination and the security of the nation at this time.

May I suggest that if there is true justification for withholding from the public the facts of one of the most tragic events of our time, it is also incumbent upon our national leadership to make it clear why.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Secrecy creates fear.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert H. L. Johnson  
Mayor

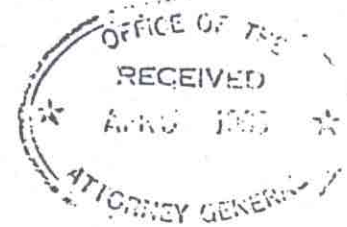
The President  
The White House  
Washington 25, D. C.

RHLJ/bw

Supreme Court of the United States  
Washington, D. C. 20543

CHAMBERS OF  
THE CHIEF JUSTICE

April 5, 1965



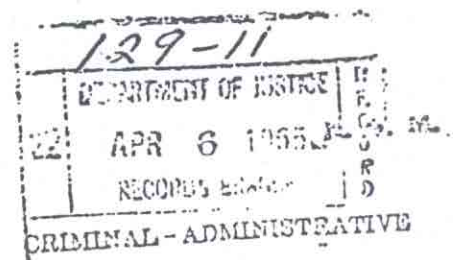
Honorable Nicholas deB. Katzenbach,  
Attorney General of the United States,  
Justice Department,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

The President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy gave careful consideration to the proper disposition of its records before it delivered them to the National Archives. It wished them to be held there for the benefit of the American people. At that time, it decided that it was in the best interests of all concerned that the policy relating to the Commission's records provide for the fullest possible disclosure.

At the same time, the Commission recognized that its records contained investigative materials which were classified by the originating agencies to protect the security of the United States. Furthermore, among such materials were numerous items in which inhered serious potential for character assassination and other similar misuse to the injury of innocent persons.


The Commission, after full consideration, concluded that it did not have either the authority or the necessary information to determine the technical questions as to when the classified materials should be released without injury to the security of the country. It decided that the responsibility for that decision must of necessity be left with the originating agencies and the Attorney General, as the chief legal officer, in accordance with established law and policies of the Government. It also concluded that such agencies and the Attorney General could best determine what safeguards were necessary to protect innocent persons in the release of defamatory materials.



In arriving at the foregoing conclusions, however, the Commission assumed that all of the determinations by the agencies and the Attorney General would be made in recognition of the overriding consideration of the fullest possible disclosure, and that all other proper factors, including the disclosures that have been made, would be taken into account. The Commission had no desire to restrict public access to any of its working papers except those classified by other agencies. It was with these thoughts in mind that the Commission, on its dissolution, committed its papers to the National Archives subject to the laws and regulations concerning the release to the public of classified and restricted materials.

We hope that this report of the attitude and conclusions of the Commission concerning the full disclosure of its records will be helpful to you in the formulation of your proposal for making the materials of this Commission now in the National Archives available to the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Tharion".