

NATION/WORLD

Specter for public JFK files

Senator says commission never saw autopsy photos

By Jack Torry

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WASHINGTON — Sen. Arlen Specter told a Senate committee yesterday that he and other investigators for the Warren Commission were not permitted to examine the photographs and X-rays of the autopsy performed on President John F. Kennedy following his 1963 assassination.

But Specter, who urged that Congress approve a bill requiring the federal government to make public virtually all its files on the Kennedy assassination, said commission members questioned the surgeons who performed the autopsy, and said he was "confident that Warren Commission conclusions will stand."

The commission, chaired by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, concluded in 1964 that Kennedy was assassinated by a single gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald. The findings have long been criticized, most recently in Oliver Stone's film, "JFK," in which the filmmaker suggests that the federal government and CIA were linked to a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

Specter testified just moments before Central Intelligence Agency Director Robert Gates pledged to release "every relevant scrap of paper" that the CIA has relating to the assassination.

He said the CIA yesterday was releasing all files it had on Oswald before the assassination, even though they amounted to just 110 of the 300,000 pages of documents the agency has on the Kennedy assassination. He said he had formed a committee to review all other documents relating to the assassination.

An emotional Gates vividly recalled hearing of the assassination while a student at William & Mary College in Williamsburg, Va. He told the committee that he went to Washington that weekend, and waited for hours at the intersections of Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues to "watch the president's funeral cortege. I will never forget it."

Then, as his voice broke, Gates

said, "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 that "with or without legislation," he was determined to make public as many documents as he could. "I believe I owe that to [Kennedy's] memory," Gates said.

Specter, Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., and Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, have co-sponsored a bill that would require the CIA, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Senate and House to release as many documents as possible relating to the Kennedy

assassination.

A House committee chaired by Stokes engaged in a two-year investigation ending in 1979 into the Kennedy assassination. The thousands of pages of records produced by that investigation are sealed until the year 2029. The bill would release those records.

Specter, in testifying before that committee in 1978, first revealed that the Warren Commission did not have access to the photographs and X-rays of Kennedy's autopsy.

"The wishes of the Kennedy family prevailed in not having those available even to the commissioners or to the staff," Specter said yesterday,

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adding that Warren may have been shown the photographs.

Later, however, under questioning from Sen. John Glenn, D-Ohio, chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, Specter softened his remarks, saying the "Kennedy family did have a feeling on the subject."

Specter, who served as an assistant counsel to the Warren Commission, said the theory that Oswald fired all the shots at Kennedy "has been much debated. I think it is correct. But if it isn't, so be it. Let someone come forward and disprove it."

"Was there a conspiracy?" Specter asked. "It's not possible to prove a negative. But I believe, had there been any evidence of a conspiracy, we would have known about it long before today."

"But if there was a conspiracy, let it all come out, and let the facts be disclosed."