

2 lawmakers want JFK files

Press news services

WASHINGTON — Two key members of Congress proposed opening secret government files on President John F. Kennedy's 1963 assassination but predicted that the long-closed records would not prove a conspiracy.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, and Sen. David L. Boren, D-Okla., said yesterday they were introducing legislation to resolve lingering public doubts about the assassination as well as new questions raised by the movie "JFK."

"This is an important step of keeping faith with the American people, of meeting our responsibility, of restoring trust in government and of having openness in government. And it is especially important for those of the younger generation in our country," Boren, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told a Capitol news conference.

Stokes cautioned against expecting big revelations. "I can assure you we didn't seal up any smoking gun in our files," the former chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations said.

The joint announcement was made three months after the release of director Oliver Stone's darkly conspiratorial retelling of the Kennedy assassination, which notes that investigative files on the slaying are sealed until 2029.

The movie, which has been nominated for eight Academy Awards, contradicts the official explanation that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin. Instead, it attributes the president's death to a massive government conspiracy.

The film provoked angry denunciations from many government

opened to 'restore trust'

officials involved in the two major investigations of the assassination, but it also produced a chorus of official calls for opening the files.

"I think that everybody on the commission will be glad to see it all out," said Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., a former counsel to the Warren Commission. "And if there's anything that's contrary to the findings of the commission, so be it. Let the chips fall where they may."

The legislation would apply not only to the closed files of the Warren Commission and House Assassinations Committee but also

to all closed files generated by Congress or any agency of the executive branch. Stokes said the measure also would extend to sealed records in federal courts.

Even Russia is requested by the bill to disclose any records that the former Soviet Union's intelligence agencies may have concerning the assassination.

One veteran Kennedy assassination researcher has estimated that the federal government may be holding 2 million sealed records, most of them classified for reasons related to national security or per-

sonal privacy.

Boren and Stokes predicted overwhelming support in both houses of Congress and a fast-moving process for releasing the files.

The legislation was referred to one committee in the Senate and three committees in the House, each of which is expected to hold hearings before sending the measure to the full House and Senate. Stokes said he anticipated a floor vote this year.

The measure is also subject to

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President Bush's approval. Bush has said previously that he does not oppose opening files on the assassination.

The legislation calls for court appointment of a five-member citizens commission within 90 days of enactment of a new law to review all closed records on the assassination now held by government agencies.

Documents would be released through the National Archives and copies would be made available to the public through the Government Printing Office or libraries designated as official government depositories.

Only records that meet specific exemption categories would not be disclosed. Those exceptions include documents that would invade the privacy of a living person, identify a confidential government informant or disclose a government protective security procedure that is still in use.

"I will be very, very surprised if 99.99999999 percent of the documents are not fully released," Boren said.

He did note, however, that autopsy photographs and X-rays of the murdered president would not be released. Those records are in the National Archives but may be viewed only with the permission of the Kennedy family.

The legislation also would not unseal records assembled by the House Assassinations Committee on the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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