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EDITORIALS



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Open It Up, Let's Take a Look

CIA and FBI directors agree on need for full J.F.K. file disclosure

Government archives bulge with hundreds of thousands of pages of classified material related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963. A lot of it was assembled in the course of congressional hearings and, under an order voted by the House, is to be kept locked up until the year 2029. Additional masses of paper are held by the executive branch and are also hidden from public view. The justifications offered for the sealing of all these files have grown less convincing with the passing years.

Worries about exposing certain overseas intelligence sources and methods today seem far less compelling than they once might have been. And concerns about protecting innocent witnesses or subjects of investigation from

possible defamation can be alleviated by requiring that legitimate individual privacy be adequately protected. The important thing is that the fullest possible record be made available.

Many Americans, polls find, still doubt the key 1964 finding of the investigation headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he shot Kennedy. Though the files may indeed contain few surprises, as some officials say, they should be opened so that scholars and the public may judge for themselves.

This is something that CIA Director Robert M. Gates and FBI Director William Steele Sessions agree on. Both have told the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee that they favor release of classified in-

formation about the Kennedy assassination. Gates says the CIA will send to the National Archives the 110-page file it compiled on Oswald between his defection to the Soviet Union in 1959 and his return to the United States in 1961. The rest of the Oswald file—33,000 pages of post-assassination material—could be released under proposed legislation.

That legislation would establish a judicially appointed board to review and release assassination material, leaving the President the power to hold back documents that might compromise national security. That's probably as close to a complete venting as can be expected. Nearly 30 years have passed since the tragedy in Dallas. It's time for the records to be opened.