

Key Reversal On Release of JFK Records

Chairman of 1979 panel will consider unsealing files

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Incensed by a film suggesting a coverup in President John F. Kennedy's assassination, a key lawmaker says he is now willing to consider opening secret files on the killing.

Citing film maker Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," Representative Louis Stokes, who was chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, said in an interview with Reuters on Thursday: "I am certainly open to considering the question."

Stokes had opposed unsealing some 848 boxes of records on the ground that everything substantive had already been made public.

He had argued that the unpublished material consists largely of raw FBI reports that might defame innocent people.

The material is currently scheduled to be withheld until 2029, 50 years after the panel reported its findings. Such embargoes are standard in congressional investigations, and their chief purpose is to protect personal privacy.

In its July 1979 final report, the committee concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, and that there was no conspiracy involving the Soviet Union, Cuba or any federal agency.

But it suggested the possibility that organized crime was involved and raised doubts about the one-gunman theory of the 1964 investigative commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

The House panel reported its

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findings after a \$5.8 million, two-year inquiry into the deaths of Kennedy and the 1968 killing of the Rev. Martin Luther King. It published 29 volumes of its findings.

Stokes, an Ohio Democrat, expressed resentment at any implication in Stone's film that the embargo of his panel's records was part of some huge coverup.

"I do have some very real problems with a person like Oliver Stone who has done no investigation of the matter," the lawmaker said. He said Stone had done a "dis-service to the integrity" of the official investigators.

Rekindled Interest

As recently as two weeks ago, after "JFK" opened nationwide and renewed interest in conspiracy theories, Stokes had maintained his long-standing position that the records should not be released.

But in the telephone interview, he said: "I'm not locked in concrete in terms of my position." He said he was offended at the suggestion that anything with a bearing on the panel's conclusions was being concealed.

Without the support of the Cleveland lawmaker, now in his 12th term and heading the House ethics committee, there is little chance that the House would vote to unseal the records.

A previous resolution to open the files, introduced in 1983 by

Connecticut Republican Stewart McKinney, never, reached the floor for a vote.

Because the full House sealed the records, it would take a vote of the House to unseal them. Stokes said that so far Representative Lee Hamilton of Indiana, another influential senior Democrat, has been the only House member to urge him personally to seek such a vote, Stokes said.

He added that the CIA and other U.S. agencies that shared records with House investigators would have to be involved in any early unsealing because of agreements entered into at the outset.

Ted Kennedy Favors Unsealing

In an interview, meanwhile, Senator Edward Kennedy yesterday agreed that all the secret records should be released.

"I think you'll find out over any period of time that the Warren Commission was clearly the most responsible result," Kennedy told WGNC-TV, a cable television station based in Worcester, Mass. "But I respect other people's conclusions."

Kennedy said he has no desire to see the movie "JFK," which shows actual footage of the killing and includes a graphic re-enactment of the autopsy.

"It is distressing and saddening," Kennedy said. "Obviously, it's a very painful experience to have . . . you know, the advertisement, the pictures, the scenes."