

Bill to Release JFK Files Moves to White House

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The House enacted a comprehensive JFK records bill yesterday, calling for the disclosure of virtually all the government's files on President John F. Kennedy's assassination and setting up a review board to track them down.

The measure, drafted and passed in the Senate in August, now goes to the White House. The Justice Department has said it would recommend that President Bush sign it.

The records, many still secret, are held by Congress, federal agencies and presidential libraries and include everything from CIA and FBI reports to newspaper clippings and tax returns.

Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, rescued the bill from death-by-adjournment by accepting the Senate version and dropping

his demand that the board be appointed by a special panel of federal judges rather than by the president.

Brooks contended that his approach, approved by the House in August, would have been preferable to the Senate-backed measure calling for appointment by the president and confirmation by the Senate.

Brooks said he took the step "with some misgivings" but was committed above all to enactment of a bill in this Congress.

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman John Glenn (D-Ohio), a key author of the Senate measure, said the records would be released with little bureaucratic delay. Even before the review board is appointed, affected agencies would be required to start identifying and organizing all their records pertaining to the JFK assassination.

Those records that could be made public immediately would be

transmitted to a National Archives special collection that would be set up 60 days after the bill became law. Documents that seem to qualify for "postponement" would be sent to the review board for a decision. Its decisions would be final for congressional records and reversible only by the president for executive branch records.

"Postponements" in the release of certain records would be granted only when, for example, disclosure would identify "an intelligence agent whose identity currently requires protection" or confidential sources who would face "substantial risk of harm" if their identities were made public.

It is expected that the board would need three years to complete its work. It would have the power to direct certain agencies to search for additional records or information, and if necessary, investigate the facts of that information.

The board also would have the power to subpoena private parties, conduct hearings and require any government agency "to account in writing for the destruction" of any JFK assassination records.

The measure orders the archivist of the United States to grant public-interest fee waivers for copies of the records.

The JFK records bill, expected to cost \$4.5 million a year, was introduced in March by Senate intelligence committee Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.) and Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), former chairman of the House Assassinations Committee, in response to the renewed controversy sparked by Oliver Stone's film "JFK" and its charges of government conspiracy and a coverup of the assassination.

Glenn tightened the measure to give the review board more authority and to provide for a systematic disclosure process.