



AP photo

"JFK" helmer Oliver Stone, right, confers with former Robert Kennedy press secretary Frank Mankiewicz during yesterday's House hearing.

JD opposes Stone's plea to open files on Kennedy

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BY DENNIS WHARTON

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Dept. of Justice yesterday weighed in against legislation that would open files related to the assassination of President Kennedy.

The surprise move by the Bush administration came on the same day that "JFK" helmer Oliver Stone testified before the House national security subcommittee in favor of the bill.

Stone, who was served up mostly softball questions from House members, told lawmakers that "the

stone wall must come down" on the Kennedy files.

Under the proposed legislation, FBI, CIA, Warren Commission and other classified material related to the Kennedy assassination would be made public through the National Archives. Without passage of the bill, the files would remain sealed until the year 2029.

The Justice Dept. came out against the legislation in an eight-page statement sent to Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), who chaired yesterday's hearing.

In the missive, assistant attorney

Turn to page 18

JUSTICE OPPOSES OPENING JFK FILES

Continued from page 3

general W. Lee Rawls claimed that release of classified documents is a matter of "executive privilege" and the White House should have a say on how the files are released.

The bill "would severely encroach upon the president's constitutional authority to protect confidential information," wrote Rawls.

Conyers criticized the JD position, claiming, "I do not understand this resistance. I had expected cooperation, not political posturing and stonewalling."

Stone also lambasted the JD, asking, "Why don't they offer one creative proposal to work with Congress (to get the legislation passed)?"

The Bush administration's stand did not appear to hurt prospects for passage of the bill, and even Republican members of the subcommittee indicated support for the measure.

An aide to Rep. Frank Horton (R-N.Y.) said the legislation is "on a fast track" and that there is "room for compromise" to win over the Bush administration.

The administration's position may become more clear May 15, when CIA director Robert Gates will testify before Conyers' subcommittee.

Stone called the Kennedy assassination the "unsolved crime of the

century." The Warren Commission finding that Kennedy had been killed by a lone assassin "seemed incredible when it was published and has proved more so with each passing year."

The director said that "our enemy lies in ruins, and the danger some Soviet agent may learn something embarrassing to the CIA or Naval Intelligence (if the files are released) is no longer important—if it ever was."

Conyers heaped praise on Stone, saying, "You moved the country and Congress to act" by making "JFK." "I appreciate your contribution to our country's attempts to become more open."

Conyers asked Stone whether his pic did not "overglamorize" New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, who, critics claim, violated the constitutional rights of innocent citizens in his zealous pursuit of the assassination.

Stone replied that he had not had time in the film to put in Garrison's defects. Stone noted, however, that were it not for Garrison's diligence, the public would never have seen the famous Zapruder film that recorded the assassination.

Conyers came to Stone's defense when one of the witnesses at the hearing criticized the gar conspiratorial view endorsed the pic.