

# Backers Ask JFK Data Bill Action

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Backers of a bill to require public disclosure of government records concerning the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy warned yesterday that it may die unless Congress takes action before the summer recess.

House Government Operations Committee Chairman John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) and ranking minority member Frank Horton (R-N.Y.) said the drive has been stalled because their committee and the House Judiciary Committee have approved different versions of the bill. The Democratic leadership has yet to say which one it prefers.

If the indecision continues into September, the lawmakers said they were afraid that preoccupation with election campaigns could make it impossible to enact the measure this year.

"We must keep the pressure up to get these records out as soon as possible," Conyers said. "This is an election year, and many fear that after the election administration officials may not feel as inclined to cooperate in this effort."

Both House bills would set up a five-member review board to collect assassination-related materials and arrange for their disclosure at the National Archives unless there is "clear and convincing" grounds, such as national security considerations, for postponing publication.

The House Judiciary bill, however, provides for appointment of

board members by a special federal court panel, while the Government Operations version calls for appointment by the president and confirmation by the Senate. The two bills also differ on the precise grounds for postponement, and the Judiciary Committee version creates what could be a large loophole by exempting from the definition of "assassination material" documents donated to presidential libraries under a deed of gift.

Several witnesses urged the Government Operations Committee not to let President Bush, a former CIA director, make the appointments. The administration has suggested that judicial appointments would be unconstitutional, but G. Robert Blakey, a Notre Dame law professor who served as chief counsel of the House Assassinations Committee in the late 1970s, scoffed at the contention. He argued that for Bush to make the appointments would create an appearance of impropriety because of his CIA credentials.

James H. Lesar, president of the nonprofit Assassination Archives and Research Center, said a Newsweek poll last spring "indicated that the 'CIA did it' theory is the preferred theory of the American public" concerning Kennedy's murder. David Belin, a former Warren Commission lawyer, said he shared the concern over Bush's making the appointments.

Lesar assailed the Judiciary Committee bill for the "gaping hole" it created for donated records. Blakey said the review board should have full authority to decide what constitutes "assassination material," including, for example, the power to inspect FBI surveillance records in the early 1960s of Mafia figures, especially in Tampa and New Orleans, that were not reviewed by the House Assassinations Committee.