

Library Moving to Release JFK Tapes

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BOSTON, Feb. 2—Officials of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, responding to calls for greater disclosure, are attempting to speed declassification of Oval Office tapes recorded secretly more than 30 years ago.

The library, an agency of the National Archives, has been stymied by a Catch-22 situation: The National Security Council (NSC) requires transcripts before it can perform declassification procedures, but the library is under orders from the National Archives not to transcribe the tapes.

"What we are exploring is the possibility that the National Security Council would consider if declassification could proceed, based on listening to tapes with a detailed log of the speakers," library spokesman Frank Rigg said. He said the NSC has not replied.

The policy review was prompted

in part by complaints raised recently by Nigel Hamilton, a British author touring the United States to publicize his new biography of the young John F. Kennedy, the first of a projected three volumes on the assassinated president.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and his three surviving sisters have criticized Hamilton for his

A British author complained about library policy.

depiction of their parents, Joseph and Rose Kennedy, as being cold and even abusive. In turn, Hamilton criticized the family and the library's curators for withholding documents and manipulating release of others in order to burnish the image of the late president.

On Monday, Sen. Kennedy said he too favored swift release of the Oval Office tapes. The library holds 248 hours of tapes recorded secretly there, along with 12 hours of recorded telephone calls.

The materials originally were considered the president's personal property, according to Rigg, and the property of his heirs—Sen. Kennedy; the president's widow, Jacqueline Onassis, and the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Now, federal law makes the tapes government property.

Nevertheless, Rigg said, they cannot be made public until the NSC releases them.

Rigg said the library did not withhold materials from the public or from scholars on its own initiative, and he denied persistent complaints that the library acts as an agent for the Kennedy family.

William Johnson, the library's chief archivist, said the library honors restrictions imposed by donors.