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News works

Black Caucus Wants Congress to Investigate Dr. King's Assassination

by Frank Browning

Negotiations are nearly complete among House Speaker Carl Albert, Democratic Majority Leader Tip O'Neill, DC Congressman Walter Fauntroy, and members of the House Black Caucus to open a full Congressional investigation into the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Three weeks ago, *Newsworks* published the first segment of author Mark Lane's investigation into the roles of the Memphis police and the FBI in the King murder.

Since then, there have been a stream of top level secret meetings between Black Caucus members and the Democratic leadership. Those meetings were highlighted by a supersecret meeting Tuesday afternoon, August 24, between Coretta King, widow of the slain Civil Rights leader, O'Neill, Albert, Fauntroy, and Georgia Cong. Andrew Young.

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King

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The resolution would combine two resolutions already on the House floor introduced by Cong. Tom Downing (D-Va) and Henry Gonzales (D-Tex), each of which calls for reopening probes into the various assassinations and the attempted killing of George Wallace in 1972.

After one week, the resolution would come to a full House vote—a vote on which success seems almost sure since there are a combined total of 137 co-sponsors on two resolutions.

The structure of the select committee remains undetermined, but Downing is the likely chairman, according to key Congressional staff involved. Downing will retire at the end of the current term. At least three members of the Black Caucus will probably be named to the committee if it is established. The names most frequently mentioned are Walter Fauntroy and Andrew Young (former colleagues of King's at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—SCLC), and Yvonne Burke (D-Ca).

"The Black Caucus was extremely influential, if not key to this whole thing," Downing aide Rick Feeney told *Newsworks*. "If not for the Black Caucus, nothing would have gone through this current Congress."

Mrs. King told the House leaders she wanted the investigation of her husband's killing reopened by Congress. That meeting was critical to the House probe because until then, Mrs. King had adamantly opposed a new probe, to some extent mimicking the positions of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Rose Kennedy, the late president's mother.

"I'm confident we've finally gotten it down," Cong. Fauntroy told *Newsworks*. "We have the principal actors behind it. I've got it now where I think we're going to get it Wednesday or Thursday."

The new Congressional investigation would come from a resolution expected from the House Rules Committee Wednesday or Thursday as the Committee's final piece of business this session.

That resolution, if voted out, will call for establishing a select House committee to reopen the investigations of the murders of John and Robert Kennedy, as well as of King.

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"It would have been dead without the Black Caucus," Fauntroy says. "This whole thing took an enormous amount of persistence and skill to get it this far."

Initial plans for a Congressional investigation into the King assassination were under discussion among Black Caucus leaders and the Democratic leadership in early August. A press conference had been tentatively planned August 26—two days after Coretta King's Washington visit—at which Fauntroy would call for an independent probe of the King killing.

Then, a series of meetings were lined up with the Democratic leaders, and some staffers began to wonder privately if the whole plan had been sidetracked.

Fauntroy also expressed private fear that revelation of Congressional interest in a new probe would cause the FBI to move hard against the probe. Much of the new investigation into the King killing—only a portion of which was printed in *Newsworks*—raises very serious questions about police and FBI behavior before, during, and subsequent to the assassination. Hence, an extraordinary blanket of secrecy has surrounded the last month of maneuvers within the House and within the Black Caucus itself.