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JFK Assassination Records Caught Up in Clinton Has Yet to Name Review Board; Aides Say Bush Camp Took

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President Clinton is more than four months late in complying with the law calling for disclosure of most secret records about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, but aides say he will get around to it "shortly."

The law requires Clinton to make nominations to a special five-member review board that will be in charge of the process, especially the ticklish questions of what constitutes an "assassination record" under the statute Congress enacted last year and whether it can still be kept secret.

Recommendations for the board, which must be confirmed by the Senate, first went to the White House when George Bush was president. Since then, even Hollywood producer-director Oliver Stone has weighed in with suggestions.

According to the law, "the President shall make nominations to the Review Board not later than 90 calendar days after the date of enactment of this act." Bush signed the measure last Oct. 26, making the deadline Jan. 24, just a few days after Clinton's inauguration.

It seemed unlikely Bush would make the appointments before leaving office since he expressed so much distaste for the law when he signed it. He complained that the measure left him too little room to prevent disclosure.

But as Clinton moved in, aides

say, the paperwork moved out. Recommendations required by the law from the American Historical Association (AHA), the Organization of American Historians (OAH), the Society of American Archivists and the American Bar Association (ABA) were boxed up for the long trip to College Station, Tex., along with millions of other documents destined for the future George Bush presidential library.

"The paperwork got shipped off campus, and we had to get it resubmitted," said deputy White House press secretary Lorraine Voles. She confirmed that recommendations recently went from the White House office in charge of such appointments to the desk of presidential personnel director Bruce Lindsey, a sign of some progress.

"We expect to name them shortly," Voles said, noting that the White House still has quite a few positions to fill "at every level of government."

Under the JFK records act, however, the review board was given three years at most from "the date of enactment" to do its work. Seven months have passed, and the nominations must still be confirmed by the Senate.

The law requires Clinton to "consider" recommendations from the ABA, the archivists and the two historical organizations. According to copies of their lists, made available to The Washington Post, the suggestions are:

■ ABA—attorneys Samuel Dash of the District, Richard E. Friedman of Chicago, Michael S. Greco of Boston,

Paul F. Rothstein of the District, Neal R. Sonnett of Miami and John R. Tunheim of St. Paul, Minn.

■ Archivists—Elsie Freeman Finch, retired education branch chief at the National Archives; Larry J. Hackman, assistant commissioner of education for New York state and former director of special programs at the John F. Kennedy Library; and William L. Joyce, past president of the society.

■ AHA—historians Anna K. Nelson, American University; Blanche W. Cook, City University of New York; and Athan Theoharis, Marquette University.

■ OAH—historians Stephen E.

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Key Paperwork

Ambrose, University of New Orleans; Mary Frances Berry, University of Pennsylvania; Kermit L. Hall, University of Tulsa; and Richard S. Kirkendall, University of Washington.

The legislation grew out of the controversy over Stone's movie "JFK" and its allegations of high-level government involvement in the assassination. James H. Lesar, president of the nonprofit Assassinations Archives and Research Center here, said Stone sent his recommendations to the White House in April, based largely on Lesar's suggestions.

"My foremost concern is not with the time it's taken to get the board

appointed, but whether or not the nominees will know anything about the Kennedy assassination," Lesar said.

He said the Stone list includes Quinlan Shea, former head of the Justice Department's freedom of information appeals office; Josiah Thompson, author of "Six Seconds in Dallas"; attorney Howard Roffman, author of "Presumed Guilty", another book on the assassination; historian David R. Wrone of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point; clinical psychologist Richard Levine of Madison, Wis.; Katherine A. Meyer, a former Public Citizen Litigation Group lawyer; researcher Paul Hoch, author of a periodic newsletter on the JFK assassination; Gordon Winslow, official historian for the Dade County (Fla.) courts; and attorney Dash.

Controversy over what constitutes an "assassination record" al-

ready is bubbling in the courts in several lawsuits Lesar is pressing. For instance, in one 12-year-old case for the FBI records requested by the House Assassinations Committee in its investigation of the late 1970s, Justice Department lawyers argued at a March 4 hearing here that records on Mafia figures that the committee used were "not at all related to the Kennedy assassination" because the committee determined that the crime figures in question had "absolutely no link to the assassination at all."

Lesar protested that this approach would rule out countless documents since the FBI has taken the position that "nobody was involved in the assassination but Lee Harvey Oswald." He maintained that if a record "is relevant to the investigations of the assassination, it's a Kennedy assassination record."