

Specter: Remove bullet fragments

Former Gov. Connally was buried with the fragments from the JFK slaying.

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Sen. Arlen Specter, who developed the assassination theory that it was a single bullet that hit President John F. Kennedy and wounded former Texas Gov. John B. Connally Jr., said yesterday that he would support the removal of bullet fragments from Connally, who was buried Thursday.

"My preference would be, if it was acceptable to Mrs. Connally, to have the fragments out," Specter said. He was speaking at a news conference before checking out of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where doctors removed a benign tumor from his brain on Monday.

Of the bullet fragments that lodged in Connally's wrist and thigh nearly 30 years ago, Specter said: "I think it is the sort of physical evidence which is obtrusive but not excessively so under the circumstances, and I think that every last fact which is out is desirable. . . . The standard ought to be to put everything on top of the table."

Connally died Tuesday at age 76 of pulmonary fibrosis. Several assassination investigators called for the bullet fragments that remained from the Nov. 22, 1963, shooting in Dallas to be removed before Connally was buried. Connally always maintained that he and Kennedy had been hit by different bullets.

The FBI in Dallas had recommended that an attempt be made to recover the evidence in the hopes of settling the long-standing dispute over whether it was a single bullet fired by a single gunman that caused seven nonfatal wounds to both Kennedy and Connally. Kennedy was killed by a second bullet.

But the FBI has no jurisdiction over the case. The assassination of a president is not a federal crime, said an FBI spokeswoman.

Specter has played a central role in the assassination controversy since he was a member of the Warren Commission and posited the single-bullet theory, endorsed by the commission in a 4-3 vote. But the commission's conclusions have been challenged by numerous assassination investigators, who said that a single bullet could not have traveled such an unlikely path.

That path, as described and ridiculed in Oliver Stone's controversial 1991 movie *JFK*, was tortuous if not physically defying. The bullet zigzagged, said the movie, halted in mid-air, and at one point, made "a dramatic U-turn."

A *Nova* documentary broadcast in 1988 on PBS concluded that the single-bullet theory was valid "despite its implausible aspects." Nonetheless, only 19 percent of the American public believes Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, according to a May 1991 survey by the *Washington Post*.

Asked yesterday if he thought retrieving the fragments from Connally would settle the controversy once and for all, Specter said: "I do not, because somebody will always find something else to question."