

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER®

62nd year

Thursday, March 12, 1992

75¢ (California) \$1.25 (Elsewhere)

Legislation to open JFK files said 'imminent'

By Kevin Phinney

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, is poised to introduce legislation opening all government files relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The call to release the files, now sealed until 2029, is largely an aftershock of the film "JFK," director Oliver Stone's unflinching repudiation of the Warren Report.

"Introduction of the legislation is imminent," said Frank Mankiewicz, former press secretary to Sen. Robert Kennedy, who is handling non-entertainment-related press for the film. "Some of the terminology is still being hammered out, so we don't know what

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the precise language will be yet."

A bill calling for the release of files related to the president's murder is expected to be introduced on the House floor within days, said a spokesman for Stokes, the former chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The committee determined in 1979 that certain evidence suggested there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, who was shot to death during a motorcade through Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

If the legislation manages to open the files, "JFK" and Stone will have earned their own place in history. No film before has gone as far to indict the government and been successful in obtaining classified government documents.

Stone met with Stokes and Mankiewicz on March 4 in Washington, and separately with Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., and David Boren, D-Okla., to discuss the files'

release.

In his Santa Monica office Tuesday, a haggard Stone reflected on the media frenzy surrounding his film. Although the impending legislation gives him "a tremendous sense of accomplishment," he said the journey has left him weary and caused him to lose interest in directing "The Mayor of Castro Street," a film detailing the death of San Francisco gay activist Harvey Milk.

"I just can't do another assassination film right now," Stone said, rubbing his eyes. "This is the highest mountain I've ever climbed. Taking on the subject of Vietnam with 'Born on the Fourth of July,' I had Pat Buchanan and Bob Dornan after me, and I wanted to respond back then. But Universal talked me out of it, saying they were in the middle of an Oscar campaign and didn't want to rock the boat.

"But this has been completely different. This has been war from day one, when someone stole a copy of the script out of the Warner Bros. copy room and began circulating it. The attacks have been unremitting since then," he said.

The scope of the bill would reach far beyond merely disclosing the files of the House Select Committee, according to G. Robert Blakey, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame. Blakey, who served as counsel to Stokes during the committee's hearings, is currently helping draft the legislation.

Although Stokes declined comment until the bill is actually introduced, Blakey said the congress-

man has long been on the record as to what materials should be released. Included are the House files, the files of the mid-'70s Church committee (formally known as the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence), and documents from the executive branch, which would incorporate files of the CIA, FBI, Secret Service and military intelligence.

According to Blakey, no members of Congress have publicly or privately opposed the release of the files, and Stokes has also secured the approval of both CIA chief Robert Gates and William Sessions, director of the FBI. To have executive files opened, the president would have to sign a bill releasing them.

"In addition, Congressman Stokes would also like to see us make a request of the Russians for the KGB files and records of the GRU, the intelligence unit of the general staff of the Soviet Army," Blakey said. While admitting that Stone's "JFK" was instrumental in stirring interest in the 29-year-old murder, Blakey scoffed at the notion of governmental involvement in the assassination.

"If you were to characterize people in government, they wouldn't be in hobnail boots," Blakey said. "They would be more like the Keystone Cops. For Oliver Stone to believe the government

had a hand in the assassination is simply naive."

Honored with eight Oscar nominations, "JFK" has been assailed by various media and political figures as "the twisted history of Oliver Stone." Critics also lashed out at a "study guide" recently released by Warner Bros. to high schools and colleges that aims to put the film in a historical context, including not just assassination theories, but facts pertaining to the Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations and the country's deepening involvement in Vietnam.

"Yes, I know, I've supposedly been poisoning the minds of America's youth," the director said. "But I would rather give them facts and alternate theories than the John Wayne bad-guy-shoots-good-guy fairy tale pabulum they've been fed for the past 30 years."

In addition, Applause Books will release a heavily annotated version of the script written by Stone and Zachary Sklar, probably with the "JFK" title. The book gives factual sources for the events dramatized in the film, includes appendixes, a bibliography and additional sources. □