



State of Alabama

Don Siegelman
Secretary of State

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July 26, 1985

Mr. Stephen D. Yslas, President
Los Angeles Police Commission
Suite 144-150 Parker Center
150 N. Los Angeles Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Yslas:

I have recently learned that the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners will, in the near future, be making a determination concerning the release for public and scholarly examination of materials from the investigation of the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy. Because of the national significance of this question, I hope that you will not mind if I add a few thoughts on behalf of your concern in this area.

During his presidential campaign in 1968, when I was president of the student government at the University of Alabama in, Robert Kennedy spoke on the campus and I had the opportunity to meet and talk with him briefly. Contrary to the expectations which some might have had for this event, the response he received from the student body on our campus was warm and enthusiastic. For thousands of Americans whose political interests were largely shaped during that era, Senator Kennedy stands out as a great inspiration to public service and social commitment. The blow of his untimely death, was one which our country was ill-equipped to bear, particularly when added to the preceding losses of President Kennedy and Dr. King.

Part of the sad legacy of these deaths, I believe, is the sense of public unease which they have inspired, not only with respect to their background and causes, but also in relation to the effectiveness of public institutions in dealing accurately and openly with the problems they have posed.

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Because democracy itself is imperiled when public figures are assaulted, such incidents pose a serious test of the credibility and accountability of the institutions which are called upon to deal with them. We in Alabama are, of course, very conscious of the impact of such events through the effects of the disabling attack in 1972 on Governor Wallace and the lingering chance that all may never be known about some of its background. Regardless of the ideology or viewpoints of the leaders involved, the distortions of our public life through such political violence are profound, though often forgotten.

My responsibilities as Secretary of State of Alabama involve many questions relating to governmental information and responsiveness. Because I serve as custodian for a wide range of public documents, I have become especially sensitive to the effects on citizen confidence and participation, here and elsewhere, when facts on important public events are withheld or sharply restricted. The uncertainties and suspicions thus produced also transcend ideological groupings and make it harder to promote a belief in the fairness of the basic workings of our systems. Knowing, as I do, that past disclosures in the Robert Kennedy case have been more restricted than in other comparable cases, and that serious questions have been raised, I believe it is wise of your body to seek the most responsive and forthcoming ways of addressing these concerns. To avoid the recurrence of tragedies like the death of Senator Kennedy, our most valuable resource is the information from which we can learn why and how they occurred in the past.

I know very well that such factors are already in your thoughts, but I wanted to add my support for your current efforts in these directions. In my state, as around the country, we will benefit from the increased public understanding which can flow from your decisions on these matters.

Sincerely,

Don Siegelman
Secretary of State

copies: Mr. Maxwell E. Greenberg
Mr. Stephen D. Gavin
Ms. Barbara L. Schlei
Mr. Samuel L. Williams

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