

JFK Assassination Probers May Give Mafioso Immunity

By MARGARET GENTRY

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Assassinations Committee has prepared a bit of pressure in case crime-syndicate boss Santos Trafficante balks at questions about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Trafficante was to testify today, but committee members thought he might claim protection of the Fifth Amendment, keeping silent on grounds that his testimony might incriminate him.

The committee prepared to meet such a move with a grant of immunity from prosecution, which makes a witness liable to a charge of contempt of Congress if he still refuses to testify.

Trafficante was not granted immunity when he refused to answer questions before the committee during an early stage of its investigation in 1977.

Trafficante, identified by the committee and by law enforcement authorities as a longtime leader of the Mafia's Florida operations, said his "physical condition" prevented his appearing yesterday afternoon, according to the committee chairman, Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio.

In the finale of a month of hearings on Kennedy's death in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, the committee hoped to establish whether Trafficante had ties to Jack Ruby, the Dallas nightclub operator who shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald in the Dallas police station. The Warren Commission concluded Oswald killed Kennedy and neither he nor Ruby was part of a conspiracy.

The committee also planned to

ask Trafficante if he played a role in a CIA plot to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro and whether that had anything to do with Kennedy's murder.

Evidence yesterday identified Trafficante as the man who controlled the Mafia's lucrative gambling interests in Havana until 1959, when Castro came to power, closed down the casinos and deported Trafficante and other Americans involved in their operation.

The committee produced a deposition from retired CIA official James O'Connell, who said he was the CIA's liaison with Trafficante and other mob leaders recruited to assassinate Castro in 1960.

O'Connell said Trafficante smuggled poison pills into Cuba to be put in Castro's food, but the plot collapsed.

The committee also asked Jose Aleman, a leader of anti-Castro Cubans in Miami, about his statements that Trafficante told him in the summer of 1963 that Kennedy "was going to be hit." A "hit" is mob slang for a contract murder.

The Washington Post in 1976 quoted Aleman as saying Trafficante complained about the Kennedy administration's crack-down on organized crime but then remarked Kennedy would not continue to be president.

But yesterday, Aleman said he no longer remembers exactly what Trafficante said about Kennedy. Under questioning, he said he has feared for his safety ever since the article appeared and believes Trafficante or Cuban intelligence agents "will try to do something to me."