

November 18, 2016

The Hon. W. Neil Eggleston
Counsel to the President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Mr. Eggleston,

October 26, 2017 will mark the 25th anniversary of the JFK Records Act, one of the most successful full disclosure measures in the annals of open government law. We write to ask your support for effective enforcement of the Act now and under the next administration.

The JFK Assassination Records Act was approved unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on October 26, 1992. The Act resulted in the declassification of some 4 million pages of records related to the assassination of President Kennedy. The Act also serves as a model for other open government measures that have made public key chapters in the nation's history without compromising legitimate secrets. As President Obama said in August, "we have a responsibility to confront the past with honesty and transparency."

The JFK Records Collection is now the single most-requested body of records at National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. Scholars, journalists, historians, and students have found these records invaluable for writing the history of the Cold War, Kennedy's presidency, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Warren Commission, Vietnam, the counterculture, and Watergate.

The final test of the law will come on October 26, 2017. That's when all of the redacted documents in the collection, as well as nearly 3,600 JFK records still withheld in full, are scheduled to be declassified in their entirety. The staff of the National Archives is now preparing for the online release of all material before the statutory deadline, an ambitious goal that we hope will be fulfilled.

One provision of the Act gives federal agencies the right to request continued postponement of JFK records after 2017, if release would result in “identifiable harm” that outweighs the public interest. As authors, historians and investigators, we believe, withholding any portion of any JFK records would result in identifiable harm to the public interest. After 53 years, continuing JFK secrecy would provoke unnecessary suspicion and flout Congress’s clear preference for full disclosure within 25 years of 1992. And it would deny the American people access to portions of our history.

We ask you, as White House Counsel, to affirm and uphold the spirit and language of the JFK Records Act, and to instruct all U.S. government agencies to fully release all assassination-related records on or before October 26, 2017.

Signed:

G. Robert Blakey, general counsel, House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA)

Russ Baker, author

Rex Bradford, President, Mary Ferrell Foundation

Deb Conway, Publisher, JFK Lancer

Dan Hardway, HSCA investigator

Dan Ellsberg, author

Doug Horne, Assassination Records Review Board analyst

Brian Latell, former CIA Cuba analyst

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Larry Sabato, author

Peter Dale Scott, author

Phil Shenon, author

Anthony Summers, author

Robbyn Swan, author

David Talbot, author

Howard Willens, Warren Commission assistant counsel.

