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National Archives Decides to Withhold Records Related to the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

Declines Request for 50th Anniversary Declassification Project

The National Archives today refused the request of a Washington non-profit public interest group to declassify secret records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in time for the 50th anniversary of that tragic event in 2013 (see attached 6/12/12 letter of Gary Stern, General Counsel of the National Archives). The Archives reversed a commitment by Assistant Archivist Michael Kurtz made at an Archives public forum in 2010 at which time he stated the remaining secret Kennedy assassination records would be released by the end of 2013. The Archives today says that Kurtz “misspoke” when he made that commitment to the public.

Kurtz’ promise to process the secret JFK related documents fulfilled President Obama’s expressed desire that his administration be the most open in history. Today’s reversal of release of these records defeats President Obama’s pledge that his be the most open administration in history.

The National Archives states that it does not know the extent of secret files in its collection related to the Kennedy assassination, but that CIA is withholding 1,171 classified documents related to the assassination. The Archive’s acknowledges that in 2006 the CIA speeded up releases of documents with releases dates through 2010, but that CIA declines to do so for the remaining documents due to “logistical requirements” even though, according to the National Archives, only 1,171 CIA documents of undetmined volume remain to be declassified.

The request for release of the secret documents was made by the Assassination Archives and Research Center (AARC), a Washington, D.C. non-profit public interest group in a letter signed by several of its board members and attorneys Mark Zaid, Charles Sanders and Prof. G. Robert Blakey, who served as the chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The letter made the point that the 50th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination in 2013 will result in widespread discussion and news coverage, and that government documents related to the assassination should be made public in order for a fully informed discussion.