

Other Viewpoints

Don't use Farm Bill to hide corporate ag

Suppose you step outside one morning to enjoy the crisp autumnal air. You stand on your porch, take a deep breath ... and gag at the stench.

Maybe it's coming from the stream that flows nearby. The water didn't used to have that sheen. Maybe it's riding on the northerly breeze. The wind doesn't usually blow from that direction.

So you start asking around and wind up checking with the Environmental Protection Agency. The folks there tell you that a nearby corporate farm has a history of violations. When you ask who owns it and where it is, the EPA is mute. Congress won't let it say. Follow your nose.

That nightmare scenario could occur too often if the federal Farm Bill, now in congressional conference committee, retains provisions in the House version that would slap an unneeded, overly broad muzzle on the EPA.

The professed motivation makes sense. Small, family farmers have reported incidents of environmentalists targeting them for harassment and vandalism. The government does not need to help by turning over farmers' addresses and names under the Freedom of Information Act. That is why the act already protects that kind of personal information.

Certainly, sometimes mistakes happen. The EPA this year improperly released records of about 80,000 livestock operations to environmental groups. When it figured out its error, the agency asked for the records back, and the groups complied. No harm done. The Farm Bill's secrecy provision would have changed nothing.

What it would do is extend secrecy to corporations. It would protect records about owners, operators and employees of agricultural operations. That includes corporations that own or operate industrial farms and concentrated animal feeding operations (think lots and lots of pigs and everything that comes out of them). Current protections apply to people, and while in the realm of campaign finance, corporations are people, the Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that the "person" in "personal privacy" still matters for purposes of public records.

Large corporate agricultural operations can cause serious environmental, health and quality-of-life harm in communities. Allowing them to hide behind a congressionally provided mask would erect significant barriers to accountability and monitoring.

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback wants his state's agricultural industry and other heavy consumers of water to get serious about a long-term management strategy. Across the border in Missouri, the Clean Water Commission recently revised water-quality rules to set stricter limits on pollutants.

If federal records related to some of the biggest users are off limits, states will have a devil of a time with enforcement and verification of who is doing what to the waterways....

— The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press



Fifty years brings back weird memories

We have been inundated this week with historical flashbacks to the Kennedy assassination, the events leading up to the fateful drive and the aftermath of the shooting.

Do you remember where you were when you heard the first reports of the shooting? I think most folks who were around then do remember vividly where they were. It was so shocking that someone would shoot and kill our president that disbelief was the buzz word of the day.

For many of us, time seemed to stand still. I was in Latin class (yes, they still had Latin class in public schools then) and word spread through my high school like wildfire. Teachers were crying, as were many of my classmates. We all rushed to the civics classroom to watch the only television available, and sat there in stunned silence until they announced that the president was dead.

What followed was nearly a blur, as our country mourned the death of our dreams and the end of what had been called Camelot. The riderless horse, the widow and children standing silent as the coffin passed, little John saluting his father's casket, the faces of the crowds as the procession passed all held our nation's rapt attention. Television brought it all to us in our homes.

No matter where you went, folks were talking about the events in Dallas. Jack Ruby thought he would be acclaimed as a hero by



Sharon Friedlander

• Musings

killing the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, but in reality he robbed us of the ability to question him and maybe, just maybe, get some answers to why this all came to pass. Conspiracy theories still rage, as no credible explanation has ever been given to our nation on why or even who to anyone's satisfaction.

How different would our country have been with Kennedy at the helm for at least the rest of his term and probably for a second one? Would we have been so immersed in Vietnam or any of the other Asian theaters of that time? Some believe that Kennedy could do no wrong, but others did not hold that belief, thinking he was a mafia wonk and a womanizer.

What I remember most about his presidency was the awful sight of troop trains and equipment passing our high school on the way south to protect us from the communists only 90 miles from our shores. If you lived in Florida, you were aware of how close that threat was.

Have you ever seen a train like that rolling through your town? There were soldiers

on that train among the equipment, and they didn't look much older than my classmates. Some probably weren't.

I had already been through the drills in grade school on how to evacuate all kids on trains heading south. We were required to have dog tags on at school. The seventh graders went to the first-grade classrooms and took the hands of the little kids, and we all walked to the rail line just a couple of blocks from our school. Our nation lived in fear of the "bomb," and this was the response Florida chose.

Imagine how today's kids would respond to this kind of drill. They have seen so much war at the dinner table, they have become immune to the fear of war. The draft is gone, we fight wars by remote control, and our television shows are all about vampires and the undead.

We are no longer the nation of innocents who surrounded John F. Kennedy and the dreams that came with him to the White House. We no longer look for the warrior on the white horse. Too bad. We lost something valuable in those times, and we will never get it back.

I am glad I saw some of it for myself and hope some of our kids today understand these events that changed our world.

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Time to open sealed files

I add my voice to others demanding that the government finally release the thousands of documents yet in government – mostly Central Intelligence Agency – vaults dealing with one of America's most horrific tragedies, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Nov. 22, 1963. A 50-year wait is long enough.

The controversy stems from the unpublished portion of the Warren Commission's records, which were initially sealed for 75 years – one lifetime, or until 2039 – reportedly to protect "innocent persons who could otherwise be damaged because of their relationship with participants in the case."

The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 was to make specific information available – but how does one know what to ask for unless one knows it exists? Extracting information one piece at a time has been too slow. Holding back information amplified the perception that the government must have something to hide.

Dissatisfaction with the Warren Commission's findings came early and it suffered from a touch of illegitimacy, as the person who benefited most was the one who became president and created the investigating commission.

Congress, not Lyndon B. Johnson, should have created the investigating organization.

Nonetheless, investigative panels followed over the years with mixed results: The Ramsey Clark Panel, Rockefeller Commission, Church Committee, and finally the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1976.

The committee concluded that "President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy" but agreed on little else. Moreover, it is doubtful they had all the documents. The FBI and CIA tended to respond only to specific requests for information. They, like the Warren Commission, did their investigation mostly in secret. Unbelievably, they too sealed their evidence for 50

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• **Harold Pease**
Liberty Under Fire

years under Congressional rules.

Still, unlike other assassinations of the '60s, controversy followed this one. In 1992, Congress passed a law creating the Assassination Records Review Board to collect all documentation relating to the Kennedy and other assassinations. Millions of pages of formerly secret records were declassified and everything else was to be released in 2019. They conducted numerous interviews now available. Some were especially disturbing.

"Navy photo developer Sandra Kay Spencer told the ARRB in sworn testimony that the autopsy photos in the Archives were not those she processed on the weekend after the assassination. Autopsy photographer John Stringer similarly disavowed photos purported to be those he took of JFK's brain during a supplementary exam. Other medical interviews contained similarly astounding allegations" (ARRB Medical Testimony, Mary Ferrell Foundation).

Dr. Charles Crenshaw, a third-year resident at Parkland Hospital, and eyewitness to everything that happened to Kennedy in the trauma room, had never been interviewed by any governing agency. In his ABC 20/20 interview in 1992, he shared with Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs the following: The shots to the head and neck were entry wounds that came from the front, not from the back as the Warren Commission had concluded. The back of

Kennedy's head was blown out and the neck wound was the size of one's little finger, just large enough for the trachea.

Photographs of the autopsy from Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, after the body had been flown home, showed a neck wound three inches wide, presumably attempting to show an exit wound which would support shots coming from behind and the lone gunman theory. This is important, as Crenshaw claims to be the last person to see Kennedy before removal from the room. Someone tampered with the wound.

A few days later, the young Dr. Crenshaw was in Parkland Hospital in Dallas again when Lee Harvey Oswald was brought in. While working on him, he was tapped on the shoulder to answer a phone call from the White House. It was President Johnson requesting a death-bed confession from Oswald. 20/20 obtained a White House schedule and concluded that it could have happened as Crenshaw claimed.

None of this was in the Warren Commission's report. Dr. Phillip E. Williams, also in the room, confirmed the Johnson call ("The Doctor's World," by Lawrence K. Altman, M.D., *New York Times*, May 26, 1992).

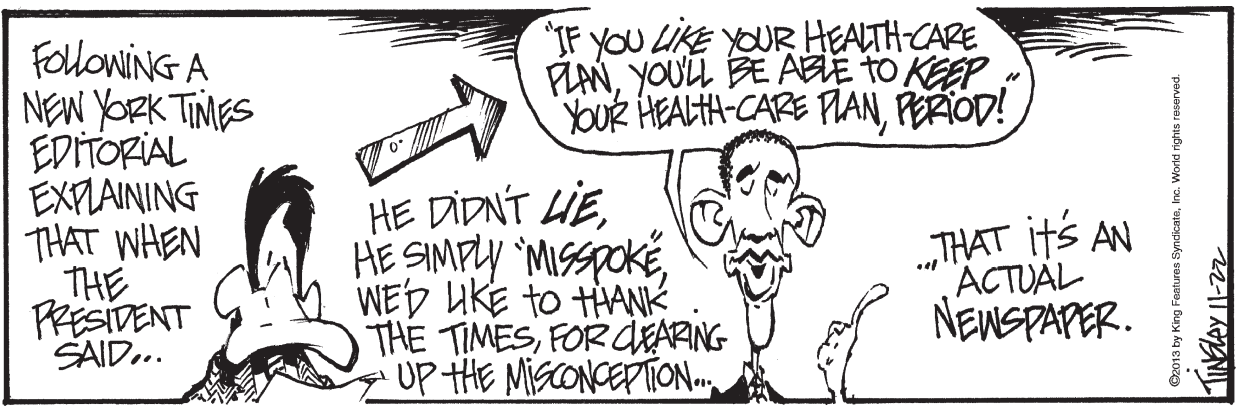
Why wait? Withholding or resisting the release of any documentation rightfully fuels conspiracy theorist. In this sense, the federal government is the origin of such theories.

For most it probably does not matter who conspired to kill Kennedy – whether the CIA, communists, (Oswald claimed to be a Marxist), organized crime, Johnson (destined to be dropped from the ticket in the next election), or even a lone gunman, as it happened so long ago. What we want is all the documentation made available, and we want it now.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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