

[Letter from John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, to Robert S. McNamara, Secretary, United States Department of Defense (Feb. 8, 1962), *reprinted in Military Cold War Education and Speech Review Policies: Hearings before the Special Preparedness Subcomm. of the S. Comm. on Armed Services (Part 2)*, 87th Cong. 508-509 (1962).]

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: You have brought my attention the fact that the Senate Special Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee intends to ask witnesses from your Department to give testimony identifying the names of individuals who made or recommended changes in specific speeches.

As you know, it has been and will be the consistent policy of this administration to cooperate fully with the committees of the Congress with respect to the furnishing of information. In accordance with this policy, you have made available to the subcommittee 1,500 speeches with marginal notes, hundreds of other documents, and the names of the 14 individual speech reviewers, 11 of whom are military officers. You have also made available the fullest possible background information about each of these men, whose record of service and devotion to country is unquestioned in every case, and you have permitted the committee's staff to interview all witnesses requested and to conduct such interviews outside the presence of any departmental representative. Finally, you have identified the departmental source of each suggested change and offered to furnish in writing an explanation of each such change and the policy or guideline under which it was made.

Your statement that these changes are your responsibility, that they were made under your policies and guidelines and those of this administration, and that you would be willing to explain them in detail is both fitting and accurate, and offers to the subcommittee all the information properly needed for the purposes of its current inquiry. It is equally clear that it would not be possible for you to maintain an orderly Department and receive the candid advice and loyal respect of your subordinates if they, instead of you and your senior associates, are to be individually answerable to the Congress, as well as to you, for their internal acts and advice.

For these reasons, and in accordance with the precedents on separation of powers established by my predecessors from the first to the last, I have concluded that it would be contrary to the public interest to make available any information which would enable the subcommittee to identify and hold accountable any individual with respect to any particular speech that he has reviewed. I, therefore, direct you and all personnel under the jurisdiction of your Department-[*509]-ment not to give any testimony or produce any documents which would disclose such information, and I am issuing parallel instructions to the Secretary of State.

The principle which is at stake here cannot be automatically applied to every request for information. Each case must be judged on its own merits. But I do not intend to permit subordinate officials of our career services to bear the brunt of congressional inquiry into policies which are the responsibilities of their superiors.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN F. KENNEDY.