

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL CHEMISTRY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115

April 5, 1971

Dr. Henry A. Harbury
Department of Biological Sciences
University of California
Santa Barbara, California 93106

Dear Dr. Harbury:

As I told you in our telephone conversation, I have decided to accept a position in the Biology Department at the University of Utah. The decision was made in spite of many attractions which Santa Barbara holds for me, among them an excellent, though small, molecular biology group which I found very congenial, pleasant and ample laboratory space, a very pretty surrounding community, and the personal fact that both my own and my wife's families live in California. Dr. Englesberg has suggested that it might be of help to you to have a letter describing in some detail the negative aspects which nonetheless prompted a decision against Santa Barbara, and this letter responds to that suggestion.

All of my concerns about Santa Barbara have a common origin, namely what appears to be a continuous decline in state commitment to, and financial support for, a vigorous and excellent university system. Some particular consequences of this decline which would have affected me directly (and which thus formed the substance of my reluctance to join the Santa Barbara faculty) are the following:

1.) Because of financial strictures, the salaries that can be offered, at least to junior faculty, are not competitive with those offered by other universities.

2.) The recent sequence of announcements canceling contemplated increases in faculty numbers and even eliminating existing faculty positions makes the future of a junior faculty member an uncertain one at best. (You may remember that one such announcement on the day of my visit to Santa Barbara made it temporarily unclear whether the position for which I was being interviewed would actually exist.) It may be worth pointing out that besides its obvious, personally unsettling effects, such uncertainty also diminishes the sense of confidence and responsibility that one can bring to the effort and commitments (to students and grant awarding agencies) required to initiate a research program.

3.) As a corollary to the decreasing support for faculty, there seems little prospect that the Biology Department or Santa Barbara as a whole will soon enjoy the growth for which it is prepared. For example, the department now has an excel-

lent nucleus for a biochemistry and molecular biology section, but, to provide a truly high level of internal stimulation and excitement, that section should have representatives of several areas of interest and expertise now absent. There seems little likelihood that such representatives will be added in the near future.

4.) For whatever complex of historical and political reasons, the university seems burdened by a ponderous bureaucratic organization, the inherent disadvantages of which have been magnified by the present financial crisis. (The inertia of the system was evidenced for me by the sequence of procedures which the Biology Department was required to follow in preparing to offer me a position and in the qualifications and uncertainties which had to be attached to descriptions of that position.) The implication of this organizational awkwardness to me is that the pursuit of even modest academic, procedural, or other changes I might come to regard as desirable would be likely to demand exhausting expenditures of time and energy. An academic environment refractory to change because of externally imposed organization can only be a frustrating one.

I hope you can sympathize with these reasons for my decision. Because of my admiration and good wishes for the University of California system, I also hope that time will see the sources of most of them corrected.

Sincerely yours,

Lawrence Okun