MAR 20 1969

DATE: March 20, 1969

TO : J. Lederberg

FROM : E. Levinthal

SUBJECT: Return Mars Sample Study

I received a phone call from Mr. R. H. Olds, Lockheed, Sunnyvale, on March 7th. He wished to discuss a proposal he is preparing in response to a NASA RFP. The purpose of the proposal is to study a range of missions whose accomplishment would be enhanced by the development of a nuclear rocket stage. It was felt that no one mission could justify the development but that perhaps a sufficient collection of scientific goals could be found. One such goal to be studied was a return sample from Mars. This is to cover opportunities from 1975 onward. My impression is that a fairly extensive study is being asked for. He didn't know which NASA office was issuing the RFP.

I expressed to him my concern that any resources were being devoted to such a study (referring only to the Mars return sample segment of the study). Even optimistic projections of the knowledge of the planet that will be obtained from prior US missions ('69, '71, and '73) could not justify the planning of such a mission for 1975. Even a few thousand dollars spent in this coming fiscal year on such a study, in competition with the pressing near term needs of the '71 and '73 missions, postpones further into the future the time when we would have enough information to justify carrying out such a mission. Such a mission would have to be preceded by a more elaborate lander than is contemplated in '73. It is therefore not cost effective to devote any resources to its study now - it is, in fact, counter-productive.

ECL/mla

E. Levinthal

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