

January 28, 1958

Mr. Hugh L. Dryden
Home Secretary
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Avenue
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Dryden:

I am writing to you on the basis of your connections both with the Academy and with the NACA.

During the past few weeks, I have been circulating the enclosed memorandum privately. My proximate objective would be to encourage the Academy to organize an ~~answering~~ ^{answering} committee to study the prospects and problems of extra-terrestrial microbiology. To be sure, I had been puzzled by the question to whom such a scientific committee could send its recommendations.

Monday's New York Times carried an article signed by Richard Witkin which was quite illuminating to me as concerns the current hassle in Washington. It was, as you must know, mainly about your address to the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences, recommending a key role for the NACA in space research. I hardly know enough about the underlying controversies to know what position to take on such a ~~matter~~ ^{matter}, but it is plain enough that some overall direction is needed, if "extremely important nonmilitary aspects of space technology would be submerged" as well as for the military development itself. I am even more concerned that the biological aspects of such research have hardly been touched upon, except perhaps in relationship to human survival in space travel. As the enclosure suggests, there is a particular urgency for a critical area of microbiological study that there be careful advance planning. A somewhat similar problem came up in connection with Antarctic microbiology-- though it is several orders of magnitude less vital than a moon project would be-- and the discouraging outcome is that there is not much point in pursuing that now, since the traffic approaches that in Times Square.

I am writing to ask whether you might have a full copy of your address, which would be, I am sure, very informative to me on the agency policy questions. I have also been in touch with Professor Goddard, as chairman of the Botany Section of the Academy, and we will probably discuss the desirability of and plans for presenting this issue at the spring meeting. Your comment on these tactics, and the procedure for it, would be useful, as would be an indication from you as to the exact date of the forthcoming session.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Chairman, Department of
Medical Genetics