

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SPACE SCIENCE BOARD

17 August 1959

Dr. Hugh Odishaw, Executive Director
NAS Space Science Board
1145 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Hugh:

In the statement of Loftus E. Becker, Alternate Representative of the United States to the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, concerning "Legal Problems which may arise in the Exploration of Outer Space" (see U.S. Mission to the United Nations Press Release No. 3179, May 7, 1959), I find the following statement:

"The question of relations with extra-terrestrial life, if discovered, should have a low priority at this time.
VI. This then is the official thinking of my Government..."

I can only interpret this statement as directly contrary to the formal action of ICSU, which places extra-terrestrial contamination very near the top of the needs for international agreement. The history of CETEX, and the SSB's emphasis on the effects of contamination through the Lederberg Committee, highlight the importance that science places on this subject.

I can only hope that Becker's statement was made in complete ignorance of the high priority on international agreement science generally places on control of the interaction between terrestrial and extra-terrestrial life.

Would you initiate inquiries among those responsible for this statement, concerning the reasons underlying the formation of this position? Perhaps a rather thorough and authoritative briefing of the compelling reasons for high priority in this matter can bring a prompt and reasonable change of this position.

Sincerely yours,

L. V. Berkner
Chairman

P.S. Quite frankly, I fear the lawyers of either NASA or State

Dr. Hugh Odishaw
Page Two
17 August 1959

have put their collective foot in their mouth through failure to study the scientific implications of their position. There is an easy but awkward "out" by contending that the statement refers to the higher forms of life, though it is doubtful that many knowledgeable persons would accept such an assumption.

LVB

cc Hartline
✓ Lederberg
Urey
Rossi

Signed in Dr. Berkner's absence