

August 26, 1959

Dr. Lloyd Berkner  
Associated Universities, Inc.  
Suite 1750, Coliseum Tower  
10 Columbus Circle  
New York 19, New York

Dear Dr. Berkner:

Thank you for the copies of your letters dated 17 August addressed to Dr. Thomas Francis and Dr. Hugh Odishaw respectively.

I am particularly pleased at Francis' enlistment especially in relation to the long-range problem of back contamination.

As to Becker's statement, when I first read this myself I had to believe that "relations with extraterrestrial life" had to do with the possibility of intelligent life and should have no bearing on issues connected with biological research. If there is any doubt about this then of course we must make every effort to apprise the State Department people of the scientific implications.

On the whole it seems to me very nearly futile to attempt to conserve scientific objectives through political negotiation. I don't have the optimism in me to believe that we and the Russians could negotiate a formal agreement which by the remotest implication could place any restraint on the pursuance of space programs. On these premises it may be just as well if contamination problems are left out of political negotiations at the United Nations level. Of course they have to be stressed in scientific contacts for example Cospar. In any case I would share your concern to know the reasons that would underlie the formulation of Becker's quoted position. It is hard for me to believe that any official policy in this area could have been formulated without consultation with the groups on which you are represented.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics