THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

pro bono humanis generis

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 12, 1988

Col. Jack Wood
OSTP
Executive Office Building
Washington, DC

Dear Jack:

I am sorry to have taken so long to submit my reflections on TSWG. The main problem is some uncertainty about just what is expected; and for security reasons I have only the sketchiest notes and summaries at hand. Then (the usual), but an unusually heavy travel schedule the last 3 months. I will offer what I can, even if that is in somewhat general terms.

First of all, I am wonderfully impressed by the leadership and coordination that has been developed for this inter-agency effort. I don't know of any comparable example of sincere and effective teamwork! Every participant is profoundly committed to the objectives; that by itself would not be a guarantee against the customary turf fights. That has been set aside; and the leadership of Pete Bahnsen, Larry Forsythe, Drew Farenwald (the ones most visible to me) has to be congratulated.

The program has comne through with a carefully thought-out set of priorities. The research is going well, and in the space of a few years is going to be an important advance in the tools we need.

It is obvious, however, that the funding is really cramped in relation to the importance and needs of the program. There is not one funded project that I would take off the list; and there are a dozen others waiting in the cue. We have a good oversight mechanism to ensure that the R&D stays on track; and if it does its job right there probably will be a couple of offloads, as there should be. The needs are really urgent: and the whole R&D program will pay for itself if it can be of even partial assistance to preventing or mitigating a single substantial incident. What is at risk is of course 20 or 30 db larger, by the most optimistic foresight (not to mention psychic and political damages).

None of the funded projects has any fat that I can see. Perhaps our oversight group ought to take a more focussed look at the couple of projects just above and below the priority funding line, a) to offer advice that might be requested about that crucial threshold, and b) to add more substance to the criticality of the projects at the line. My own recommendation would be to add 50% to the budget in FY88 and another 50% in FY89 -- no danger of any of that being wasted! But (if)(as) that may not be feasible, we have to give more focussed attention in order to be of any help about that marginal group.

My only systemic criticism is that the R&D concentrates on a lot of devices and subsystems, and not enough at the systemic level: what do you do when an alarm goes off!

The leadership is quite cognizant of this. As far as I can tell, the problem is a combination of funding and that of identifying and mobilizing the right contractors.

Please let me know what I can add. I'll respond more promptly this spring.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg