



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

1230 YORK AVENUE · NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10021

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

1 July 1978

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The Honorable Hugh L. Carey
Governor of New York
Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Carey:

I understand that the New York State Legislature has passed a Recombinant DNA (R-DNA) Regulatory bill and I am writing to urge that you veto this bill as you wisely vetoed a similar bill last year.

Before giving you the reasons for my recommendation, I should explain that I have just come from the Stanford Medical School to become President of The Rockefeller University. But I have followed the international, national, and local discussions on this matter for some time. My own scientific career has been devoted mainly to the fields of molecular biology that relate to research on R-DNA. My concerns about environmental health have also led me to consider this issue from a broad social perspective.

The question must be asked as to whether this legislation would serve any good purpose. From the beginning of the debates about R-DNA, two related questions were raised: (1) should there be regulation of this research? And (2) should regulation be voluntary or legislative? Effective regulation would have to be national, rather than local, to ensure that there would be a single standard for the country. After five years of work with R-DNA all over the world, there is no instance (or even a hint) of adverse effect on health or environment. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that R-DNA events can readily occur under natural conditions outside the laboratory.

During this time numerous expert committees have done systematic risk-benefit analyses--regarding work with viruses, bacteria, tissue cultures, and plants--and have recommended appropriate experimental procedures. The result has been a marked decline in the perceived need for any legislative regulations. To illustrate, after extensive study, the preliminary NIH guidelines are being relaxed substantially, removing more than fifty percent of the experiments from any regulation and greatly lowering the required levels of containment for the rest.

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As a result of these trends--confirmed by the vast majority of all knowledgeable scientists and physicians--draft Federal legislation has been deferred indefinitely. I am told that Senator Javits has said recently that no legislation is needed, a view apparently shared by most members of the House and the Senate.

By enacting a regulatory bill, our state would gain nothing and risk expending scarce energies and resources to no purpose. Moreover, it would be most unfortunate to set a bad precedent in the gratuitous establishment of bureaucracies to police scientific inquiry. Accordingly, my colleagues and I hope very much that you will once again veto the bill with the convincing arguments you used last year.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

bc: Rodney Nichols
Frederick Seitz
Norton Zinder