

September 11, 1967

Senator Edmund S. Muskie  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Muskie:

This is in reply to your memorandum of August 12 concerning Senate Resolution 68.

I have been following the newspaper accounts of the progress of your Subcommittee with great interest. I would, in fact, be very grateful if you could ask your staff to give me any convenient priority for receiving continuous information from your Subcommittee on this subject.

As you might readily perceive from some of my enclosed writings, some of which you may perhaps already have encountered, I share with you the sense of need for long range consideration by the Congress, of technology and the human environment in the future.

My main question has to do with the effectiveness of a generalized, on-going staff study which is divorced from pragmatic authority to allocate resources and undertake other legislative action. The most nearly comparable analogue in the Executive Branch is the Bureau of the Budget and the Office of the Science Advisor, the staff the President must have if he is to make wise decisions about resource allocation. For these reasons I have favored placing the authority for the kind of study your Subcommittee recommends as the major responsibility of the Committee on Appropriations. Even better than that might be a fundamental reorganization of the Senate Committee's system like that recommended in the final report of the Joint Committee on the Organization of the Congress, Senate Report #1414 of the Eighty-ninth Congress~~SS~~Second Session.

However, since there seem to be irremediable political obstacles towards a fundamental rationalization of the planning functions of Congress to match those of the Executive, your Subcommittee's proposal may have to be regarded as the most realistic expedient to do a job that badly needs to be done. The main function of the hearings envisaged for the new Select Committee will, of course, be educational, an encouragement to criticism and innovation, crucial steps in the legislative process. The establishment of a regular annual cycle of such hearings may gradually bring about the requisite level of public attention. In the last analysis

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the value and visibility of these hearings will depend on the quality of the witnesses called to testify.

Even without the leverage of responsibility for appropriations the Committee on Government operations could certainly exert a very salutary pressure on the Executive Branch to demand an appropriate investment in long range planning and the exposure of these plans for the widest public debate. If there is to be a Select Committee on Technology it is important that it establish at least a comparable degree of authority to elicit the appropriate executive response. This in turn will depend to a large degree on the stature of the members appointed to such a Committee and on the extent to which they actually identify themselves with its affairs and its probing.

The past two Administrations have seen a revolution in the zeal of Congress to exert its authority for the solution of our most urgent National problems. This zeal has much of its past and future strength from the kind of relationship between the Congress and the scientific and technological community that your proposed new Committee could do a great deal to cultivate.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

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*see [unclear] 11/1/67*