

January 29, 1973

Honorable Gaylord Nelson
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Nelson,

President Nixon's determination to recast the framework of government as expressed in the reshuffling of senior officials, and in statements reflecting the program-retrenchment intentions of the Office of Management and Budget has introduced many shockwaves among different constituencies; I am sure you have heard from many already.

It is hard to prove, on short notice, whether a budget-cut in one arena is worse than in another. I feel especially diffident in raising such a question where I have so obvious a personal interest to defend.

I am equally concerned, however, that if we do not speak out it may be taken for granted that we will be able to weather this crisis without serious harm. Regretfully, I do not have that optimism. Specifically, the threatened termination of training grant support from NIH for graduate students in biomedical research will have catastrophic consequences. This and other distinguished departments will be frustrated in their primary educational service functions. Esteemed private institutions will suffer particularly serious blows.

These training grant programs have, of course, been authorized and funded by congressional act over the years, and the reversal of policy now proposed by the administration is in direct confrontation with that intent. The President evidently intends to use his asserted prerogatives in impounding funds, as well as to continue a fait accompli in the executive budget. I hope that you and your colleagues in the congress will give this particular issue your searching attention before you condone an act that will go far to wipe out the standard of excellence in higher and graduate education of which the U.S. has been rightfully proud, and which has contributed so much to our technological and medical expertise.

It is especially obtuse to terminate these training programs when women are on the point of finding their just parity, and when many minority group students have found their way through undergraduate programs to qualify for leadership in the sciences.

The only rationale the Administration can give for these cuts is the ideology that we have a surplus of trained manpower. This is hardly true in the biomedical sciences, and wherever it applies it reflects rags or riches policies of support of technical programs that have distorted our long-term national needs.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr