DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

JUL 28 1961

Dear Mr. Clark:

I deeply regret that rather heavy commitments have delayed my acknowledgment of your letter of some weeks ago posing questions concerning Federal support of medical research.

You asked two questions concerning the work of the Committee of Consultants on Medical Research. The first had to do with "conflict of interest." The answer to this is quite simple. Federal support of medical research for fifteen years has relied heavily on non-Government scientists and informed laymen in the review procedure leading to the awarding of research grants. This procedure has been almost universally approved in academic and scientific circles of the country and has served to allay fears which might otherwise have developed as to Government control in areas where independence and freedom are particularly valued. It would have been very difficult for the Senate Appropriations Committee to have selected a panel for study of this program from among competent scientists and informed laymen who had not had some relationship to the research program of the country as supported by the National Institutes of Health. The consultants undertook to document in their report their judgments and conclusions. The objectivity of the study and the factual basis for the report have not been seriously questioned. The report stands on its own.

Your second question had to do with the extent to which the findings of the Committee were an expression of the views of the NIH itself. Since much of the work of the consultants was directed toward the NIH program, it was reasonable that the Committee should hear from responsible NIH officials in detail. The Director of the NIH, his immediate associates, and the Directors of each of the Institutes were heard as witnesses, and they provided a considerable amount of factual data. The Committee heard, altogether, more than one hundred individual witnesses and had access to voluminous written material, a partial listing of which was included in the report. Every segment of our society which had interest in medical research was represented among the witnesses, including organized medicine and dentistry, the pharmaceutical industry, the insurance industry,

Federal agencies other than the NIH, voluntary health agencies, private foundations, general and professional educational associations, and individuals with unique experience and knowledge. I can say unequivocally that the findings of the Committee were arrived at by an objective and independent procedure.

You asked also for my judgment as to the chief reasons for Congressional support of medical research in recent years. I would say there are four principal reasons: enlightened leadership of competence and understanding in both houses of Congress, the deep concern of the American people as reflected in the Congress for answers to our major disease problems, the dramatic results of medical research as interpreted to Congress and the American public by competent medical authorities, and the imaginative and effective leadership of the career people responsible for management of the NIH. These reasons obviously could be expanded and elaborated upon.

You asked, finally, my comment on John Russell's charges in last October's HARPER'S having to do with the medical research effort. I do not accept Mr. Russell's comments in his article, nor do I think they represent the views of the vast majority of the medical scientists of the country. To substantiate his charges, the facts as presented in the report of the Committee of Consultants on Medical Research would have to be successfully refuted.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Boisfeuillet Jones

Boisfeuillet Jones
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