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Mar. 10, 1992.

Dr. Maxine Singer,  
Carnegie Institution  
1530 F St. NW,  
Washington, DC 20005.

Dear Maxine,

This is primarily a fan letter to congratulate you on your statement in your institution's recent year book. I particularly liked your attention to the fact that the pursuit of a problematic case deprived us of the opportunity to test the responses that the scientific community had been developing as a solution to the need for tightening up.

I wish our Nat. Acad. Sci. took such a vigorous and forthright position on the misconduct issue; I don't think its management has adequately represented the interests of the scientific community. You may know that the forthcoming NAS report on this issue has been held up for months by efforts to discourage Howard Schachman from presenting a minority report. As a referee on a draft of the report I could not endorse it, for I agreed with Howard on the basic problems: acceptance of far more guilt than the facts warrant, and willingness to tolerate an excessively broad definition of misconduct, which would get the government into areas better handled within our research institutions.

I've wondered whether the issue of misconduct has not cooled down enough so that the scientific community might try to get the OSI replaced by some other administrative mechanism, which would be less oriented toward pleasing Dingell. Unfortunately, as I see it, while Bernadine Healy has been very courageous in standing up to Healy and in rejecting Hadley's approach, and has agreed with me that Dingell is a much greater menace than most scientists realize, she seems satisfied with Hallum. I found him incredibly inadequate in a public exchange that we had at the ASM annual meeting a year ago. But neither the NAS nor the NIH seems likely to provide the necessary leadership for an effort to replace the OSI. Do you see any possibilities?

On another matter, the most recent issue of Human Gene Therapy contains a statement by Bernadine at a Congressional hearing concerned with gene therapy, and I was disappointed to find that in discussing the aims of the NIH she emphasized exclusively the need to do research that would pay back the taxpayers in the form of practical results. There was no mention of the need also to continue the kinds of basic research that have always been the main source of major breakthroughs leading to unpredictable practical results. I hope her statement was simply fitted to the political context and does not signal a possible shift in policy.

You may have heard that I have had a health problem during the past half-year -- metastasis of prostate cancer to the spine, producing weakness of the legs as a result of spinal cord compression. But fortunately my medication did not interfere seriously with mental function, and I was able to remain cheerful and to complete an autobiographical essay for Ann. Rev. Microbiol. I am happy to be able to report further that I have had phenomenal progress. In the fall I was pretty much confined at home, and could walk only by leaning on a walker after every step. Now, after conscientious exercise, I can go up a flight of stairs and am beginning to walk with canes. So I expect to remain functional for some time, and I regard this phase in my life as a dividend.

With warm regards to you and Dan,

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bernie".

Bernard D. Davis