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May 12, 1965

Dr. Donald F. Hornig
Director
Office of Science & Technology
Executive Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20506

Dear Don:

I am writing to reinforce a position that I believe you already hold, namely to make every reasonable effort to utilize a 1969 test shot of Saturn 1B-Centaur as the next effort in the reconnaissance of Mars. What makes this particular time so critical is its impact on the later missions intended for the 1970's. For example, if substantial reconnaissance data are to be of any tangible value in planning a 1975 landing of a comprehensive automated biological laboratory, the reconnaissance ought to be the 1969 mission.

Perhaps more important than the specific efforts to meet a 1975 schedule for the ABL is the basic policy issue of how far our remote reconnaissance should proceed before any landing whatever is attempted. I am still deeply concerned about the possibility of maintaining adequate precautions against interplanetary contamination in a context, such as the present one, when so little is actually known about Mars that only a relatively limited number of people take a deep interest in its welfare. The program to prevent contamination has many possible leaks in it, despite an engineering design to meet given standards, and the only chance of detecting and stopping these leaks is a very wide base of informed interest in the problem on the part of the scientific public. In turn, I believe this can only be possible after there has been some substantial reconnaissance of the planet.

Hornig, D.F.

In this connection let me also reiterate a point that I do not think has been widely understood. The issue of planetary conservation is not solely one of possible prejudice to an esoteric scientific issue. It has to do with any of the now unknown uses to which Mars may be applied during the future history of the species. The past history of terrestrial exploration has all too many examples of total neglect of future interests, but by now I would hope we would do better. Our concern about decontamination of Mars missions ought to be relaxed just at that point that we can confidently predict the consequences of landing terrestrial organisms on Mars, and not before.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Copy to Dr. Allan Brown