

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 17, 1990

The Honorable Carl M. Levin  
United States Senate  
The Russell Building, Room 459  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

The Carnegie Institution of Washington strongly supports recent congressional initiatives regarding the proposed National Institutes for the Environment. As we understand the current situation, proposals for an expert and independent evaluation of the feasibility of the proposed Institutes represent an initial step.

The concept of the National Institutes for the Environment is built upon the extraordinarily successful model of the National Institutes of Health. Thus, the new entity would provide for the research essential to the eventual solution of environmental problems. Specific problem-oriented individual Institutes (i.e., climate, atmosphere, conservation, ecology, biotic resources, and so forth) would provide expertise and depth in a variety of fundamental and applied research areas. Together, the several Institutes would be joined to make a whole that can oversee research in a coherent manner, responsive to national needs. Like the National Institutes of Health, the Institutes for the Environment would likely become a focus for the world, thereby fostering the welfare of the whole planet. And, like the National Institutes of Health, the National Institutes for the Environment could foster training in the relevant sciences, thereby providing for the manpower essential to resolution of environmental problems.

Currently, environmental problems are addressed with a great deal of hand-wringing. Presumed ameliorative actions are taken without a sound scientific base. Consequently, the likelihood that the actions can actually address the problem at hand

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is unknown. Moreover, whether the actions are the most cost-effective can barely be estimated. Yet, environmental problems are likely to escalate. We can be better prepared for them if we improve our understanding of the relevant natural phenomena.

We are mindful of our Institution's historical record in support of major new national scientific endeavors. In particular, we are proud of Vannevar Bush's efforts, while president of this Institution, to provide for scientific advice to the nation during World War II and, later, to originate and foster the idea of establishing the National Science Foundation. Congressional initiatives for the proposed National Institutes for the Environment are enormously welcome. The Carnegie Institution would like to pledge its support for this effort.

Sincerely,

Maxine F. Singer

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