December 28, 2000

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

We write on behalf of the American Society for Cell Biology, a nonprofit scientific organization of over 10,000 biomedical research scientists, to strongly encourage you to veto H.R. 1795 (S. 1110), "The National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering Establishment Act."

We make this recommendation based on four serious concerns:

1. the passage of the Act did not enjoy due process or consideration and analysis by the biomedical research community;

2. if instituted, the Act will introduce significant inefficiencies to the operations of the National Institutes of Health;

3. the major premise upon which the bill is based is false; and, most importantly,

4. if enacted, the Act will significantly undermine critical integration of science and medicine, and will be a step backward for human health and welfare.

Lack of Due Process: The bill was advocated by specialized groups with narrow interests. It was unexpectedly introduced and passed on the last day of the Congressional session on a Point of Order by Senator Lott.

Inefficiencies: Congress directed the National Academy of Sciences to review the operations of the National Institutes of Health with specific concern about the proliferation of NIH institutes driven by special interests. The proposed new Bioimaging Institute is an example of exactly the sort of growth that is of concern to Congress. One of us is on record as NIH Director (HEV) as advocating a consolidation of the NIH institutes to increase operational efficiencies and scientific synergy. The proposed Institute would work in direct opposition to this effort.

False Premise: the bill claims that, "Basic research... is fundamentally different from the research in molecular biology on which the current national research institutes at the National Institutes of Health ('NIH') are based." The NIH is not based on research in molecular biology: it is based on research in many integrated and synergistic areas of the biomedical sciences and human health. Imaging and other technological advances, as well as molecular, genetic and cellular insights, are all critical contributors to the health research that is the basis of the NIH.

A Scientific Step Backward: significant bioengineering and imaging research are vigorously pursued at present in the existing categorical institutes. Separating these efforts from the diseases that they are meant to address will frustrate hard-fought and scientifically wise efforts to integrate research and clinical care.

Mr. President, you have an opportunity to conclude your term with one final act of courage in defense of biomedical research by issuing a pocket veto of this bill. We hope you will give the matter your personal consideration.

Respectfully,

Paul Berg, Ph.D.
Chair
ASCB Public Policy Committee
Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1980

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cc: The Honorable Donna E. Shalala