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February 6, 1970

Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg
Chairman
U. S. Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D. C. 20545

Dear Dr. Seaborg:

The Advisory Committee for Biology and Medicine held its 132nd meeting at AEC Headquarters in Germantown on January 9, 1970, and at the Commission's "H" Street offices on January 10, 1970. ACBM members present were Drs. Cohen (Chairman), Moseley (Vice-Chairman), Bale, Haagen-Smit, McGee, Stout and Patt (Scientific Secretary).

The ACBM heard a report from Dr. L. S. Taylor (National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements) who described the activities of the NCRP and reviewed the history of radiation protection standards and the guidelines used for setting safety standards. Dr. Taylor considers the present standards to be conservative, based on the available experimental studies. Dr. P. M. Tompkins, Executive Director of the Federal Radiation Council, then reported on the functions and role of the FRC. Discussion followed in the form of questions and comments by members of the audience which included many staff members from the different AEC divisions.

The members of the Advisory Committee, in addition to Dr. English, Dr. Burr and Mr. McCool, then met with Commissioners Johnson, Larson and Thompson in an executive session for approximately one hour. The importance of the DBM program to the Commission, particularly as it relates to the public issue of safety standards, was emphasized. The Commissioners expressed their interest in having the ACBM continue to keep them informed on all biomedical matters relating to radiation safety, uses, standards, etc., and expressed the wish to meet with the ACBM at future meetings held in Washington. The current dilemma of non-acceptance by some segments of the public, as well as of the scientific community, of the safety standards proposed for power reactors in particular, was discussed. The challenge by these dissident groups has led to a heavy demand on the time of the DBM staff, already short-handed, to provide scientific responses at both the lay and scientific levels. The need to develop a position on risk versus gain or risk versus cost

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relating to radiation standards acceptable to the public was discussed. This matter is particularly urgent in view of the current reluctance of the public to accept new technology and scientific application without assurance of what amounts to "absolute" safety.

Following the executive session with the Commissioners, Mr. C. M. Patterson, Savannah River Laboratory, presented some classified data requested by ACBM at their meeting at the Savannah River Laboratory in November 1969, dealing with tritium output. This was followed by a discussion of plutonium problems at Rocky Flats by J. H. Harley (HASL) and D. M. Ross (OS). The Committee was then briefed by Dr. Barr on the Pulison trials and by Dr. Burr and Mr. Hollister on related DBM activities. The stringent budget situation and its ominous impact on current programs of interest to DBM were reported by Mr. Whitnah; current status of construction projects was reported by Dr. Wood; and guidelines for research involving human subjects were reported by Dr. Goldstein.

The ACBM met in executive session on January 10. Dr. Burr informed the Committee that (1) Warren Sinclair has been appointed Director of the Division of Biological and Medical Research at Argonne; (2) Drs. Totter, Comar and Wagner have accompanied Chairman Seaborg on a trip to Africa; (3) Drs. Bruner and Goldstein have been asked to brief a PSAC subcommittee on DBM activities; (4) the DBM staff is undermanned and it will be necessary to make wider use of national laboratory personnel for assistance in reacting to social as well as scientific questions about radiation standards, pollution, etc. The latter led to a discussion of ways and means of developing a position to cope with such recurring questions. The point was made that many scientists in the field may not be aware of the actual and potential problems and that more information concerning these could be conveyed to them perhaps via a newsletter. The importance of a discussion of these problems at national forums was also considered.

The ACBM noted that more DBM staff work will be required if the Committee is to play a larger and more active role in the Commission's activities as suggested in the meeting with Commissioners Johnson, Larson and Thompson. Much of DBM's present effort has been diverted to matters involving essentially public relations positions which has led to a decreased capacity of its staff to cope with other important responsibilities.

In regard to the question of current radiation standards, the Committee is of the opinion that there is no basis for questioning the adequacy of the available scientific information used for the formulation of standards

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as proposed by the NCRP. It encourages the continued efforts of DBM to support sound research activities which will generate new or additional knowledge bearing on the scientific basis for setting radiation safety standards.

An ad hoc committee consisting of ACBM members Bale, Stout, Moseley and Cohen and an ecology consultant will attend the Program Directors' meeting at UCLA on February 16-17 prior to its review of the UCLA program.

The Committee reviewed possible replacements for Dr. Stead. Drs. Finch, Gurnay, and Wagner were recommended in order of priority.

The Committee also reviewed candidates for the E. O. Lawrence Award and its recommendations have been forwarded to the General Advisory Committee.

In view of the urgency to deal with the problem of the confrontation situation between the AEC and segments of the public and scientific communities relating to radiation safety standards, the ACBM expressed its willingness to meet in March in addition to, or in place of, the meeting tentatively scheduled for May. Discussion by telephone with Dr. Totter at a later date resulted in a decision to hold a meeting in Washington on March 13 and 14, 1970.

Sincerely,



Philip P. Cohen, Chairman
Advisory Committee for Biology
and Medicine