

JOHN 12/27/46

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
PASADENA 4

MANHATTAN ENGINEER DISTRICT

File No. Man. 357(R)

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 17, 1946

Dr. Paul C. Aebersold
P. O. Box E
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Dear Paul:

So far I have heard from four members of the Advisory Committee on Isotope Distribution in response to your memorandum of November 26th. I am enclosing copies of each of the four letters for your own information.

You can estimate these letters and the comments for yourself, but I think after reading them I would like to present my own views on the matter very briefly.

Because of the reported imminence of the Manhattan District being taken over by the Atomic Energy Commission, it is probably not feasible or wise for our Interim Committee to hold a meeting before this transition takes place. Rather, I think our committee should urge the Atomic Energy Commission to set up a permanent committee on isotope distribution at the earliest possible time, to authorize the Manhattan District, in the meantime, to continue present isotope distribution policies and procedures, but to have the new committee at once begin an intensive study of the problem of isotope distribution in line with the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act.

I think the members of the committee would agree on the following recommendations to the Atomic Energy Commission:

- (1) The distribution of radioactive and stable isotopes to research laboratories in this country and eventually abroad is a matter of very great importance, and should be regarded as one of the primary ways in which the Atomic Energy Commission can stimulate the progress of science. It is hardly possible for a group like ours to state whether this activity should be given priority over other activities of the Commission, but certainly the supply of stable and radioactive isotopes is a matter of major importance. For this reason, the Commission should give immediate attention to the problem of how under the Atomic Energy Act the manufacture and distribution of such isotopes can be put upon a broader base and made still more effective.

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- (2) The interim mechanism of having the commercial company prepare and supply these isotopes with a suitable cost-accounting set-up seems quite inappropriate and unnecessary under the Atomic Energy Act. This Act specifically provides that the stimulation of research in every way, particularly by the supply of such materials, is a primary function of the Atomic Energy Commission and is a government function of first importance. Consequently, it would seem to me that the whole idea of cost accounting and of individual research laboratories attempting to pay, either all or any fixed fraction of actual costs, should be abolished. Rather, the Commission should ~~pay~~ whatever cost is necessary to supply such isotopes on a scale adequate to meet the needs of research, the only criterion being the interference with other more important activities of the Commission.

In other words, every attempt should be made to put the facilities of the Commission to the greatest possible use towards forwarding research, without attempting to make individuals, or institutions, pay a fixed fraction of the cost. Rather, the payments should be reduced to token payments, such payments to represent primarily a "good faith" payment, and payments to make at least a partial coverage of actual handling and shipping costs.

I believe no one would urge that such material would be provided with no charge to laboratories, but on the other hand, I think there would be agreement that any attempt at cost-accounting should be abandoned, and that such material be supplied, even though the Government pays up to 99% of the costs. The main thing is to use facilities to their maximum output, and to make the material widely available to properly established research projects.

- (3) In addition to the provision of material, the Commission should also make every attempt to supply complete information on characteristics of isotopes, methods of measurement, and all other matters connected with the proper use of radioactive and stable isotopes. Particular attention should be paid to providing laboratories with information and possibly even equipment for making good radioactive measurements, in order that full use

may be made of the isotopes supplied.

- (4) It is most important that the program of supply of useful stable isotopes be initiated at once, and that this be made also an important activity of the Commission.
- (5) The Commission should also take steps to supply, either directly or through commercial concerns, synthesized labelled compounds of use in chemical, biological and medical work. Certainly every effort should be made to encourage and support the training of workers in radioactive and stable isotope techniques.
- (6) As to organizational responsibility for distribution of isotopes, it would seem to me that while the Commission may want to retain a policy advisory committee on distribution, all of the actual organizational work should be handled directly by an administrative organization set up by the Commission. It would appear to be unnecessary to have all requests referred to the Advisory Committee, which should advise only on general policy, leaving it to the Commission to review individual requests, and establish priorities for filling them.
- (7) The distribution of stable and radioactive isotopes to responsible foreign laboratories should be initiated at as early a date as needs in this country can be filled. It should not be difficult to establish suitable agencies, such as academies of science, in foreign countries to certify the reliability of individual requestors, or indeed, to have all requests from the country pass through such an agency. In foreign distribution again, no attempt should be made to see that the laboratory pays any specific fraction of costs, but a somewhat higher handling or token charge might easily be imposed.

As you will see, the taking over of this whole project by a civilian commission completely changes the philosophy under which research should be encouraged through isotope distribution. The Commission is now fully authorized to support such research directly, and does not come at all under the restrictions which govern a military organization, such as the Manhattan District. For this reason, a complete review of the entire subject should be undertaken by the Commission at an early date, new procedures undertaken, whose major objectives shall be in line with the objectives of the Atomic Energy Act, the wide encouragement and support of research in nuclear science and allied fields, in every possible way. The Commission does not need the "protection" of a civilian advisory committee unless it wishes the assistance of such a committee, for the Commission

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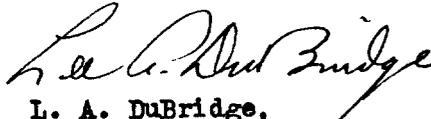
is fully empowered to set up its own policies and procedures.

Finally, if the Commission should either be unable to look into this problem immediately, or if it should wish the present Advisory Committee to make more specific recommendations as to future procedures, I think it would be wise early in the year to hold a meeting of the Committee to formulate such recommendations for future action.

I would appreciate it if you would pass these comments on to such authorities as would be interested, and I would be glad to have them passed eventually to the Atomic Energy Commission. As far as this letter is concerned, it should be considered as voicing my own personal views and I can only say that there seems to be nothing in the comments so far received from other members of the Committee which would indicate that any of them are opposed to these views.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,



L. A. DuBridge,
President

LAD:je

CC: Members of Interim Advisory
Committee on Isotope Distri-
bution Policy