THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

49 WEST 49TH STREET

NEW YORK 25, N. Y.

February 23, 1955

Dear Mr President:

At the most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees of

The Rockefeller Foundation there was an extended and sober discus-

sion of a matter of deep concern to you and to all concerned men

and women, namely, the effects of atomic radiation on living

organisms.

The Rockefeller Foundation gave significant support to

Nuclear research long before the advent of World War II. It did so

because of our strong commitment to the advance of human knowledge

for its own sake and because of the possibility that deeper know-

ledge in the nuclear field might have important practical benefits

to mankind through medical and other scientific research, What

began as a brilliant extension of man’s intellectual curiosity has

led both to nuclear weapons and challenging opportunities for

the application of nuclear resources for peaceful purposes, such as

those contained in your own highly significant Atoms for Peace pro-

posals. It may well be that nuclear developments, whether in

weapons or in peaceful application, are creating among all mankind

an ultimate common interest upon which peace might rest.

In any event, the development of nuclear weapons poses

grave questions which bear upon a wide range of human concerns, from

the lethal effects of “fall-out” to the new avenues which might be

opened for a more abundant and healthful life. If tolerable answers

are to be found, we believe that they must come from a further exten-

sion of knowledge. Our approach rests on the faith that the moral

and rational nature of man can convert an extension of knowledge

into an extension of virtue, and that he can make better decisions

if his understanding can be widened and deepened.

Our Trustees wish to contribute to a full exploration of

the effects of radiation on living organisms, with particular atten-

tion to the possible danger to the genetic heritage of man himself.

They instructed me to discuss with our Government their hope that

the National Academy of Sciences would, with Rockefeller Foundation

financial support, make a searching evaluation of present knowledge

about the effects of these newly unleashed forces upon the life pro-

cesses and attempt to uncover those questions which need further

intensive research to obtain the knowledge which man will need to

act wisely. The recent public statement by the Atomic Energy Com-

mission was undoubtedly helpful, but the statement itself suggests

that at crucial points more knowledge is urgently needed.

We believe that the National Academy of Sciences would be

an eminently suitable organization to conduct such a study and broad

appraisal; it is non-governmental in character, it is traditionally

and by law related to our own Government as advisor on scientific

matters, and it has intimate and repeated association with sister

academies of science in other democracies of the world.

It would be our hope that the end result of such studies

could be made public. But we fully recognise that if the National

Academy felt that it needed classified information, and the Atomic

Energy Commission consented to supply it, the question of publishing

reports containing such information would be subject at the proper

time to the decision of the Government.

Any such undertaking by the National Academy of Sciences

and the Rockefeller Foundation could fu7lfill its purpose only if it

had your own interest and approval. Our Trustees would wish us to

underscore that, in asking your approval, we are ourselves prepared

to act with the utmost seriousness and to make substantial private

resources available for the purpose.

Since I have emphasised the concern of our Trustees in

this matter, I am attaching to this letter a list of their names.

We are at your disposal if you would wish to discuss this further

before letting us have your answer.

Respectfully yours,



Dean Rusk

The President

The White House

Washington 25, D.C.

DR:bh

Enclosure