Cancer Advisory Board

Some time ago, we wrote (Letters, 13 Aug. 1982, p. 585) expressing our concern about the appointment of new members to the National Cancer Advisory Board without due attention to the Board's scientific competence and its broad, balanced representation of scientists involved in cancer research and treatment. While the Cancer Act sets an upper limit on the number of members (12 of 18) who are to be scientists or physicians, it requires that those who are appointed be among the leading scientific or medical authorities in the study, diagnosis, or treatment of cancer or in fields related thereto. They should "by virtue of training, experience, and background be *especially qualified to appraise the program*" (italics ours).

We write again as the six 1984 Board appointees are being selected. In the past, names of candidates for Board membership were sought out by the Executive Committee of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) from the scientific community, with thoughtful attention paid to maintaining a balanced but diverse group of outstanding scientists. A slate of these candidates, approved by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), was submitted to the President for appointment. Thus, with rare exceptions, new Board members proposed by NCI to meet the National Cancer Program's scientific needs came from the list of candidates approved by NIH and by the Secretary. In 1982, not a single candidate proposed by NIH and by the DHHS Secretary was appointed. Among appointees, the four members selected to represent scientists were practicing physicians, and only one held a faculty appointment at an academic institution. No member continuing beyond 1984 will have a Ph.D., and very few will have had experience as a principal investigator on an R01 or P01 program. None has served on a Division of Research Grants (NIH) study section. Yet, by law, the primary and the legal responsibility of the Board is to monitor the quality of the grant review process and to approve grants that may be funded by NCI.

Another important function of the Board is to advise the director on future directions of the institute. Of the $1.022 billion budgeted for 1984, $312,531,000 will support investigator-initiated research through R01 and P01 grants. This funding will support a wide variety of basic research efforts relevant to cancer, including fundamental problems of gene expression, cell differentiation, basic pharmacology, and carcinogenesis. The continuing membership has an adequate representation of physicians but a most inadequate representation of leading scientists. For the health of the national cancer research program, as well as to comply with the legislative mandate of the Cancer Act, it is essential that the 1984 appointees be outstanding scientific authorities in the study of cancer or related fields. The list of candidates proposed by NCI and approved by NIH and by the DHHS Secretary includes investigators who meet this requirement. We urge concerned investigators, as well as concerned scientific societies, to express their views so that the appointment of quality scientists to the Board is ensured. The quality and objectivity of the review of cancer research proposals and the future direction of cancer research are at stake.

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Defensive Weapons Development

I learn through R. Jeffrey Smith's article "Star Wars plan gets a green light" (News and Comment, 25 Nov., p. 901) that I have made a proposal "along [the] lines" of "studying or developing a defensive weapons system jointly with the Soviets."

I have repeatedly urged the joint development of defensive systems with our *allies*, but never have I suggested such an effort with the Soviets. In August 1983, Eugenij Velikhov, Antonino Zichichi, a physicist with the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and director of the E. Majorana Centre for Scientific Culture in Italy, and I did sign a joint resolve on a related but distinctly different subject.

The results of Soviet and American research on the effects of a large-scale nuclear war, ascertained on the basis of different computer models and, perhaps, different descriptions of variables, showed a marked disparity of results. Since a detailed and accurate report of these consequences is of utmost importance, we determined to make an extensive joint effort to identify and clarify the divergent factors. We also propose to undertake a joint discussion to differentiate between aggressive and defensive weapons systems, a point that in press coverage has given rise to unnecessary confusion.

To my mind, cooperating with the Soviets to obtain the most rigorous scientific data on effects of nuclear war is both extraordinarily necessary, completely feasible, and totally dissimilar from attempting joint military research. Clarification of weapons technology on the basis of its potential utilization is also important. But joint work with the U.S.S.R. on weapons systems beyond the discussion of generalities has none of these benefits.

I congratulate the editors of *Science* on the marked improvement, during the past year, in their coverage of the potential of defensive systems research. Perhaps in another year, they may even give up the misnomer "Star Wars" in discussing the advanced technology of deterrence based on protection.

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Teller proposes to limit the scope of any joint U.S.-Soviet study in a manner that is not clearly indicated by the text of the statement he signed. The relevant portion of the statement is as follows:

> There is a new important point which has emerged . . . namely the problem of defense weapons. The guiding philosophy of this new point is the problem of studying if it is possible to identify new means to get out from the present balance of terror. One such way is the reduction of nuclear armaments. The second is the idea of new defense weapons. Here are