BRIEN McMAHON
CONNECTICUT

CHARLES E. CALKINS
SECRETARY

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D. C.

COMMITTEES:
CHAIRMAN SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ATOMIC ENERGY
FINANCE
INTERSTATE COMMERCE
CLAIMS
EXPENDITURES IN THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO STUDY AND SURVEY PROBLEMS OF SMALL BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

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April 16, 1946

Dr. Leo Szilard
Wardman Park Hotel
Washington, D. C.

Dear Leo:

I have your letter of March 24th and have just had the opportunity to read it and the polls which you conducted. The reason for the delay as you know is that I have been so busy perfecting the atomic energy bill which has finally been reported out by the Committee.

I have read the polls with the greatest of interest and I want you to know how much I appreciate your splendid cooperation.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

Brien McMahon

United States Senator

1155 East 57th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois
June 29, 1949

Senator Brien McMahon
The Capitol
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator McMahon:

I was very glad to have had an opportunity to talk with Mr. Gordon Dean, and I wish to thank you for having arranged the interview.

Before leaving Washington I had several other conversations with persons who are cognizant of the situation and who share my concern. As a result of these conversations, I now have a clearer picture of the obstacles that will have to be overcome before things can take a turn for the better.

I expect to be back in Washington some time after the 4th of July and might contact you then again if the need arises.

It is my hope that the A.E.C. will have the wisdom to limit itself to refuting the charges made against it. It would certainly be very regrettable if scientists were called as witnesses for the A.E.C. in circumstances which must necessarily bring about a conflict between their political loyalties and their loyalty to the truth.

Very sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

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November 1, 1949

During this last year the Atomic Energy Commission was subjected to a congressional investigation arising out of the charges made by Senator Hickenlooper. The scientific community, with no single voice dissenting, supported the Commission against these particular charges. At the end of its investigation the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy exonerated the Commission by a majority vote. The undersigned believe that on the basis of the evidence placed before the Committee its verdict was correct.

However, for a long time now scientists, who kept in touch with the progress of the research and development work in this field, were increasingly uneasy about the performance of the Commission. Had the Commission not been attacked by Senator Hickenlooper for the wrong reasons, it is very likely that scientists would have voiced their criticism before this time.

While the Commission was exposed to attacks which scientists in general considered unjustified, apparently no scientist felt impelled to come forward and to volunteer information unfavorable to the Commission. But from now on scientists are going to speak up. For they cannot be expected individually to exercise such restraint any longer, and there must be no conspiracy amongst scientists aimed at the concealment of the truth.

The truth is that, as far as general development of the field of Atomic Energy is concerned, the record of the Commission is bad. In these past four years not only have we failed to build reactors of any new type but construction has not even been started on any such reactor. This and other failures of the Commission are necessary consequences of the fact that the Commission did not tackle the job of enlisting scientific talent. The Commission was not even able to hold on to the best men who had remained at work in this field at the time when it took over.

There are notable exceptions. There are at present three or four outstanding scientists working on a full-time basis in the field of Atomic Energy directly for the Commission or under its auspices.

Some of us are going to inform the Chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, Senator MacMahon, of what we know about the performance of the Atomic Energy Commission. We hope that others who are not signatories to this statement will do likewise. Any charges that are made ought to be substantiated. If the Chairman of the Committee finds that the new evidence warrants new hearings before Congress, we hope they will be open hearings.

The scientific community has high regard for the Chairman of the Commission, who time and again has given expression to their belief in the fundamental importance of our basic freedoms. The other members of the Commission are also good men -- men of intelligence and good will. We do not look to changes in the composition of the Commission as the way to improve the performance of the Commission.

A government agency which has the task of developing the field of Atomic Energy is confronted with many difficulties. It is subjected to many pressures and it frequently moves along the line of least resistance. We believe that, irrespective of who the members of the Commission may be, no substantial improvement in the performance of the Commission can be expected unless -- from here on -- it will be subjected to public criticism on the part of the scientists who are acquainted with the field of Atomic Energy.

At present there are only few scientists -- outside of the General Advisory Board of the Atomic Energy Commission which in some measure shares the responsibility for the Commission's record -- who are in an independent position and who have followed the activities of the Commission sufficiently closely to be able to speak with sufficient assurance. This increases rather than decreases the responsibility of those few. It is important that as time goes on ~~their number should increase.~~ the number of those who are informed, as well as independent, should considerably increase.

The main obstacles to progress in this field are two-fold:

Leo Szilard
1155 East 57th St.
Chicago 37, Ill.

Senator Brien McMahon
Joint Committee on Atomic Energy
United States Congress,
Washington,
D.C.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO 37 · ILLINOIS
INSTITUTE OF RADIOBIOLOGY AND BIOPHYSICS

1155 East 57th Street
Chicago 37, Ill.

November 12, 1949

Senator Brien McMahon,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator McMahon:

Towards the end of last week, soon after I saw you, I began to have serious doubts whether a public airing of the record of the AEC at this time would not have undesirable consequences which I did not appreciate at the tiem when I talked to you. What I fear is that such a public airing might precipitate a public discussion of the issue related to the topic which worries E. O. Lawrence and Edward Teller.

Clearly the issue will at some time require a top policy decision and ultimately such a policy decision will have to be the decision of the American people, and therefore will require public discussion. But as yet our top policy makers have not had sufficient opportunity to consider the issue, and even less to adjust our foreign policy to the requirements of the realities with which we are faced. It seems to me that those responsible for top policy decisions ought to have an opportunity to study the situation with which we are faced, free from public pressure, and to arrive at some tentative conclusions before the issue is raised in public. It would seem to me that these considerations may be more important that the question of either the past performance of the AEC, or its performance in the next six months.

I have advised some of my colleagues of the doubt which I have on this score, but communications within a large and scattered group are difficult and I do not know to what extent my attitude will be shared by others. In any case, I asked to be kept informed of what the final decision will be, so that I may keep you informed, as I told you I would.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

Senator Brien Mc. Mahon (URGENT) N.L.T

Joint Committee on Atomic Energy
United States Congress
Washington D.C.

O.K. 11/13/49

Since our talk in Chicago there were further developments and I personally now believe that we aught not precipitate a public discussion of the issue at this time. — Two members of the original Princeton group whom I contacted here in the East share my view. — How the others will react I do not yet know but I shall keep you informed. — Regards Leo SZILARD

1155 East 57th St.,
Chicago 37, Ill.

November 14, 1949

Senator Brien McMahon,
Joint Committee of Atomic Energy,
United States Congress,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator McMahon:

This letter I am writing to you from New York. Yesterday I sent you a telegram as follows:

"SINCE OUR TALK IN CHICAGO THERE WERE FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND I PERSONALLY NOW BELIEVE THAT WE OUGHT NOT PRECIPITATE A PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE AT THIS TIME. TWO MEMBERS OF THE ORIGINAL PRINCETON GROUP WHOM I CONTACTED IN THE EAST SHARE MY VIEW. HOW THE OTHERS WILL REACT I DO NOT YET KNOW BUT I SHALL KEEP YOU INFORMED.REGARDS
LEO SZILARD"

I trust this telegram was forwarded to you.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

LS/rm

Congress of the United States

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ATOMIC ENERGY

(CREATED PURSUANT TO PUBLIC LAW 585, 79TH CONGRESS)

November 16, 1949

Dr. Leo Szilard
1155 East 57th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois

Dear Dr. Szilard:

As Senator McMahon is still in the West, I am taking the liberty of acknowledging your recent telegram and letter.

The contents of your telegram have been forwarded to the Senator, and I am sure he has received the information by now.

Sincerely yours,

John D. Lane

Executive Secretary

AEC

Congress of the United States

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ATOMIC ENERGY

(CREATED PURSUANT TO PUBLIC LAW 585, 79TH CONGRESS)

November 25, 1949

Dr. Leo Szilard
1155 East 57th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois

Dear Dr. Szilard:

Thank you very much for your telegram, which you confirmed by letter under date of November 14th.

I am pleased that you have taken the decision that you have. Won't you please keep in touch with me from time to time? I am always interested in your views.

It was good to have a conference with you when I was in Chicago.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Brien McMahon

United States Senator