

## Dr. Harold Urey's letter regarding tuition sent to Regent Higgs is disclosed

**February 18, 1970**

(EDITORS: Following is the text of a letter sent by Dr. Harold C. Urey, Nobel laureate and Professor of Chemistry at Large at UCSD, to DeWitt A. Higgs, Chairman of the Board of Regents, University of California. The letter, made public today by Dr. Urey, was sent to Mr. Higgs in anticipation of the February 19-20 meeting of the Board of Regents in San Francisco.)

Mr. DeWitt A. Higgs

Regent of the University of California

1700 Home Tower

707 Broadway

San Diego, California 92101

My dear Regent Higgs:

The cuts in state funding for the University and State colleges and what appears to be imminent imposing of tuition on students have caused me great concern for the university and college. It seems to me that this great university within the short span of 5 or 10 years could sink to the level of some very ordinary college, and that it would require possibly 50 years to rebuild it to its present stature.

The immediate problem is tuition. This imposes a serious problem on students who are just marginally able to come to the university as matters now stand, and such students are an important fraction of the total. Also, the governor's proposal that the tuition be added to the general fund is the most vicious imposing of taxes on those least able to pay that has ever come to my attention. I received my entire education from schools supported by a country township, a town and county of Indiana, the University of Montana and the University of California. I managed this just by the skin of my teeth. Tuition at any stage would have prevented me from attending. I have a burning sympathy for any student in a similar situation.

The regents should be pointing out the many ways in which the university is of great value intellectually and technically to the state and nation far beyond the cost of the university and that little amount of tuition. May I call your attention to a possible development of enormous importance. Professor Keith Brueckner has developed a method for using heavy hydrogen as a fuel for power plants. I do not know the details, but it is sufficiently interesting to cause the Atomic Energy Commission to classify it "Secret." If this can be developed, one ton of sea water will supply energy equivalent to 600 tons of coal, and this alone would be worth more than the entire cost of all education in the world during all historic times! The development is related to the University of California in a very intimate way. Professors Birge and Menzel of Berkeley predicted the existence of heavy hydrogen. I, who paid no tuition at Berkeley, and some colleagues discovered it, and Professor Brueckner of UCSD possibly has shown how to use it industrially. Of course, we had many colleagues in these efforts from other universities, and if we had not done these things, others would have done them, but they would have been graduates of some universities just as we are.

The value of the university and state colleges to this state cannot be estimated, but all experience shows that it is great beyond any estimate.

This country is powerful and wealthy primarily for two reasons. Our ancestors took the little country school with them across this country and everyone became literate and able to do arithmetic. Second, the Land Grant College Act signed by Lincoln in 1863 made it possible for students to go to college in every state of the union. My little country school, which I entered in 1899, was built of brick and was the equal in construction to any house in the district. It must have been built around 1875 and must have represented a larger contribution from the tax payers of that age than do any educational school buildings of this age to present day tax payers. It is time for us to realize and imitate the foresight of our ancestors.

The tuition proposed would amount to about one or two dollars for each person in the state. The entire cost of the university is only some 15 to 20 dollars per person, and the cost of the state colleges about the same. All such costs will be repaid by the almost immediate returns in improved agriculture, business methods and many technical developments. If the university collapses into a third rate college, the loss will be very great indeed.

If the present strictures against the University of California continue, the present Board of Regents, in my opinion, will go down in history as those who destroyed one of the greatest universities in the world. Please don't do it.

Sincerely,

Harold C. Urey