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Dr. Duncan Luce  
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Dear Dr. Luce:

Thank you for your two letters and advice.

My basic criticism of the National Academy of Sciences arises because your panels serve key gatekeeper roles. They are believed to give the best advice of our most distinguished scientists on such matters as the creation of new national indicators and funding priorities for behavioral science. They give a degree of endorsement - and political protection - that can shape the decisions of foundations and government agencies. Any new line of investigation that depends upon new data series and significant funds to challenge orthodoxy - e.g., to evaluate and learn lessons from such quasi-experiments as Reaganomics - is dead without this support, especially as your panels and commissions give preferential endorsement for government and foundation funding to other (apolitical, to use your adjective) priorities.

I think we agree that your organization does not truly represent the best scientific advice of its members. Surely, as scientists, most of your members believe the Republican experiments to alter the modal personality of the American people and foster economic growth (reduce dependency, increase self-confidence and the work ethic, etc.) should be evaluated by the development of appropriate indicators.

I appreciate your organization's preference to avoid unnecessary political controversy. But there are creative ways to proceed, just as Surgeon Generals have moved, steadily but incrementally, to develop scientific studies concerning the effects of smoking on health. Or you could be oblique about raising critical questions, as in your new and inspired edited collection by Breslauer and Tetlock, Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy.

I still think my original suggestion - of a sponsored competition to design new indicators and Michelson-Morley tests of a full range of untested ideological ideas - would be good for the country and science, fun, greeted with enthusiasm, and produce sufficiently long-term arguments about construct validity, data interpretation (etc.) to prevent a sharp and definitive political

challenge; and that there is only a low probability that John Ferejohn (for example) would be sent to the guillotine if he directed the project for the National Academy.

A team assembled by John Ferejohn probably could nail these questions by the end of the decade. I believe it would be a wise investment, and I hope you and other national leaders in the social sciences can bring it about.

Political independence - telling the truth without fear or favor, letting the chips fall where they may - will be healthier for science and the nation. A politically-neutered National Academy of Sciences is unworthy of free men and women.

May I suggest a nightmare scenario? Perhaps, all along, Congressional leaders and the public have truly wanted the best forthright, honest, and politically-independent advice of our best scientists? As a nation we go to great length to support the intellectual integrity of scientific institutions. The members of the Academy have academic tenure and are elected for life. Its institutional integrity is guarded by mechanisms stronger than we provide even our judges - rights to elect your members and officers. The Academy may acquire funds for projects, and its advising role, without a requirement to rely upon government appropriations. Yet our best political and social safeguards have failed. And perhaps, after a decade, the leaders of Congress, the public, and the social science community (and even President Bush) deeply wish that you had played a more independent role.

Congress cannot require honesty and forthrightness from the Academy. But if Congress wishes independent scientific advice, perhaps this entire matter needs to be reviewed by its oversight committees. Not to assign blame for the fierce price the nation may have paid for a decade of unnecessary ignorance and self-created scientific silence, but to consider what changes might assure intellectually independent advice and a brighter decade ahead, with improved economic growth.

I hope we have a chance to meet in the future, and under less contentious circumstances.

Yours truly,

LS

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge

cc: Kenneth Arrow  
John Ferejohn  
James Q. Wilson