

September 23, 1966

Mr. Bill T. Moyers
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Moyers:

I would like to request your careful consideration as to whether an announcement that is now being planned to be made in the near future (October 7) by the Department of the Air Force should not better be made by the President at a press conference near that date. I really think it would be good policy to do so, otherwise I would not be writing this letter. Allow me to state the situation as briefly as I can in view of its many ramifications.

As you know, the many (about 10,000) sightings of "flying saucers" or unidentified flying objects (UFOs) that are reported to public authorities have been studied by the Air Force since 1957. The Air Force effort on this has been rather minimal, partly because many of the reports seem to originate with hysterical persons, and, in any case, the reports of the often bizarre occurrences received, purporting to involve in many instances living beings which are visitors from outer space, do not, even if real, indicate hostile intent and are thus quite reasonably considered not to be a threat to national security.

Nevertheless the reported phenomena are attracting a great deal of sensational attention, and the Air Force is being repeatedly criticized for its (a) allegedly having failed to give proper attention to these phenomena, or (b) having learned a great deal about these things but having withheld the "real truth" from the American people. For an example of the latter position, see the article by Major Donald Kehoe (U.S.M.C. Ret.) in the September issue of Saga magazine, and also the book by Frank Edwards, "Flying Saucers - Serious Business" which is reviewed by Time, September 2, p. 87.

In the past year there has been a mounting crescendo of such criticism of the Air Force. The reported phenomena are increasingly weird (see the current issue of Look, dated October 4) and there is a steadily mounting insistence on the theme that the Federal government is not being candid with the people. See John Lear in the Saturday Review, for September 3.

The Air Force has been quite properly concerned about the kind of criticism to which it is being subjected, and the probably remote but quite genuine possibility that it may not be giving this subject the attention that it deserved.

An Ad Hoc Committee of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board reviewed the subject and the Air Force's way of handling it and made a report last March which recommended that the Air Force fund an independent university study of the subject itself and of the Air Force's way of handling it (Project Blue Book).

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Hearings on this subject were held on April 5 of this year by Chairman Mendel Rivers of the House Armed Services Committee. Particular interest in it has been shown by p. Gerald Ford (R., Mich.) perhaps because last spring some sightings were reported Michigan. The report of the Ad Hoc Committee is reproduced in the printed record of those hearings so the single reference covers both of these matters of record. The report of the hearings also reprints quite a large sample of the rather sensational newspaper reports that have appeared in various newspapers during the past year.

The Air Force referred the matter of the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations to its own Office of Scientific Research (Dr. William Price, executive director) which has consulted with various university scientists about the implementation of the recommendations. See Walter Sullivan on p. 1 of N. Y. Times for August 14.

I do not know all that they have done, but in late July a staff scientist from that office, Dr. Thomas Ratchford, contacted me here in Boulder with the object of enlisting our sincere interest in taking on the recommended study on a basis which would provide for combined efforts by physical scientists and social scientists. Dr. Price and Dr. Ratchford then visited Boulder on August 10 and spent most of that day discussing the whole situation with about thirty of our faculty. Aside from the resources of the University of Colorado itself, they were drawn to this place by the location here of both the National Center for Atmospheric Research, funded by the National Science Foundation, and by the Boulder laboratory of the Environmental Science Services Administration, which was formerly a part of the National Bureau of Standards.

As a result of this conference a reasonable amount of interest was developed in taking on the project here. At the same time there was a great deal of caution about taking it on because this subject is quite generally regarded as "crackpot" among scientists, many of whom quite rightly are concerned that anyone who might undertake to do a serious and responsible study might end up by having his own scientific reputation damaged and his institution regarded as a laughing stock. The success of such a study will require the whole-hearted support of physical and social scientists at a wide geographic distribution of universities, and must be handled with the utmost care because of the factor just mentioned.

The Air Force people are as aware of this difficulty as we are and as anxious to avoid any flavor of this kind that would reduce the study's effectiveness. We discussed the need to bring the National Academy of Sciences into the picture with an over-all review or advisory committee to be announced in advance and President Frederick Seitz intends to seek approval for this from the Academy's council at its October 1 meeting. I expect he will succeed. The matter has been brought to the attention of Drs Donald Hornig, or if not to him personally, to a member of his staff, Dr. Nicholas Golovin. This White House Office we understand to be willing to lend its backing to the project. It is essential that we get the full cooperation of the National Center for Atmospheric Research; and its director, Dr. Walter Orr Roberts, has been in touch with Dr. Lee Haworth, director of the National Science Foundation, to get his approval. In addition Dr. Roberts intends to request formal approval of NCAR's participation from his board of trustees which is to meet October 11.

The administration of this university is willing to go into the venture after receiving assurances of all of these kinds of backing. The matter will be informally presented to the Board of Regents on September 30.

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The plan is that the project be set up with myself and Dr. Franklin Roach, an atmospheric physicist on the staff of ESSA here, and one psychologist of the university yet to be chosen (probably Prof. David Saunders or Prof. William Scott) named as principal investigators. Our first move would be to line up collaborators in perhaps six major universities geographically distributed across the country, and to have a conference of them to review the Project Blue Book work at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, and then to make our own plans for the study.

I expect to be in Washington (at the Cosmos Club) on September 30 to work with various Air Force people, as arranged by Dr. William Price of AFOSR, toward the full working out of an agreement for a grant in support of this project at the University of Colorado by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. At that time we will work also on details of the public announcement which we presently have in mind will be made through Air Force Office of Information channels on Friday, October 7.

All these arrangements seem quite straightforward and you might well ask, why is there any reason for White House involvement such as I suggested in my opening paragraph?

Well, perhaps there is no reason, but I feel that this is a matter which you ought to have a chance to consider and decide, instead of having it decided for you.

Frankly the reason that I think White House involvement is worth considering is because so much of the journalistic criticism that is being widely published in Saturday Review, in Look, in Saga, in the congressional hearings and in many other places (e.g., Wall Street Journal editorial of August 30) keep harping on the theme that the Government is not coming clean with the people and that there are things of great portentousness known to the Government which are being concealed. Congressman John E. Moss is known to be up in arms on this as well as other freedom-of-information issues. There is a danger, in addition to the general aura of crackpotism that hangs over this subject and complicates any study, that the study will suffer because of a feeling of mistrust among the scientists and the public at large that the Government is not being candid even with its own independent investigators. A credibility gap!

For my own part, I have been given emphatic informal assurances by Drs. Price and Ratchford that in fact there are no classified data in the possession of the Air Force that bears on the reality of visitors from outer space. There is some classification of documents in this field but that has to do with holding back details of sightings by civilians of Air Force launchings of classified missiles and aircraft, and also with details of the functioning of Defense Department radar systems, and this degree of withholding of information seems to me to be both consistent with national security and not in any rational sense detrimental to the success of the projected study. But Drs. Price and Ratchford are not in a position to give any such assurances about any information that may be available to the CIA.

I am going on the assumption that in reality the Government is being candid with regard to its best judgment about known evidence in this field, and that nothing is being held back. But it is not a question here of what satisfies me, but of the kind of charges that are being made with increasing frequency and with increasing vehemence in the public print, and the bad effect that such charges may have on possible future conduct of a study. Considerations of this sort make me think that the study should

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be announced from the White House by the President with a flat assertion from him that nothing is known to the Government bearing on the reality of supposed visitations from externally or internally controlled aircraft from outer space that is being withheld by any agency whatever of the Government. Perhaps the matter is not of sufficient importance to warrant his making such a statement in the personal give-and-take of the White House press conference, but I feel that it would be most desirable that a statement of such unrestricted generality come from him as part of the press release.

It may be that the whole uproar will die down in the near future and that the whole study is unnecessary. But the study, if it is to be made at all, needs to be made under the highest sponsorship, and I know of none higher than that of the White House.

I apologize for the length of this letter but the whole situation is a rather complicated one. I hope that you will be able to give it your personal attention and to get in touch with Dr. Hornig, or with Dr. Price, to check up on my version of the facts and my opinions about them. Also I would be happy to discuss the situation with you personally as part of my visit to Washington on September 30, if that seems desirable. I mentioned this matter casually in a recent personal letter to Juanita Roberts but later decided that that was altogether too informal an approach to a matter of this much possible importance.

Sincerely yours,

E. U. Condon

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