

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION  
BOULDER, COLORADO 80302

February 12, 1968

To: President Joseph R. Smiley  
Vice President Thurston E. Manning

From: Scott Tyler *Scott*

Speaking of incompetence, as our UFO people were doing so publicly last Friday, I believe it is now obvious that Bob Low and--to the extent that he was involved in the release of information about the latest fiasco--Ed Condon have demonstrated that they are totally incompetent to deal with the press on University matters.

As you may know, the story in Friday's Colorado Daily concerning the firing of two persons from the UFO project was not an item ferreted out by Daily reporters, but was a prepared release delivered to the Daily by UFO personnel and containing the statement that Dr. Saunders and Dr. Levine had been dismissed for incompetence. Low informs me that Ted Manning was aware of the firings but that the decision to issue such a news release was reached by those in charge of the UFO project without consultation elsewhere.

I am not concerned with the firings. I am concerned with the rather large blunder made in announcing them. No public information office has a written rule that "Thou Shalt Not Publicly Announce That A Professional Employee Has Been Fired For Incompetence," but the newest student intern in my office knows it automatically. Aside from the obvious public relations aspects of such an announcement, there are legal ramifications to consider. Since the favorite indoor sport around Regent Hall is practicing law without a license, let me do a little: The delivery of such a release to the Daily by the UFO people is libel per se insofar as Condon and Low are concerned, and there is a strong possibility that the University itself is also guilty of libel in this instance. The only defense for Condon and Low is that the statement is true and that it was made public with good intent. I do not know the facts involved but even if we presume that by washing a great deal of extremely dirty linen in public the truth of the statement can be established, I do not believe that good intent can be. The question of whether the University is also liable involves whether Condon and Low were acting as University agents and is beyond my newspaperman's knowledge of libel laws.

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While this is the worst public relations blunder the UFO people have made, it is only one of several. Others which come to mind quickly have included the announcement of a grant application six months prior to the receipt of the grant (University policy is not to announce applications but money in hand), and the sending to Pennsylvania of an agent with insufficient briefing which resulted in his hiring of a public relations firm there on behalf of the University and the subsequent refusal of the UFO people to pay the bill until forced to do so by our Purchasing Office.

Technically, UFO project releases are to be channeled through my office and technically Condon et al have agreed that there will be no discussions of the substance of the UFO study pending the final report. In fact, whatever mood Condon and/or Low happen to be in when a reporter calls, and the prestige of the reporter, have been the only factors governing what is or is not given out about the UFO project. (Incidentally, the two words used most often by Colorado reporters in discussing the project with me have been "joke" and "boondoggle.")

I recommend that public announcements concerning the study be divided into three categories:

- (1) Those having to do with such mechanics as contracts, personnel, etc.; I respectfully request that either President Smiley or Dr. Manning, as appropriate, direct Condon and Low to channel all such items through my office, with the understanding that the final decision on what is or is not released is my responsibility. Perhaps an appeal procedure to either the president or vice president would be in order in case Condon-Low and I cannot agree (as we obviously would not have in the case of the firings for incompetence story).
- (2) That Condon be free to make whatever internal rules for his people he chooses to make concerning discussions with the press of the methodology and substance of the UFO research pending the final report. That these rules be reduced to writing, with copies to all UFO personnel and to the Office of Public Information.
- (3) That a clear understanding between the UFO personnel, the Office of Public Information, the Air Force and the National Academy of Sciences be reached soon concerning the release of the final report. I personally believe the report should be made public at the proper time by either my office or the Air Force. However, my office is not interested in getting involved at all unless there is some assurance from Condon and the Air Force that no deals have been made with certain writers and/or publications. (I am aware of two major attempts to arrange such deals; I feel certain there have been or will be other such attempts.)