

November 23, 1971

Honorable Mr. John Tunney  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Tunney:

In response to your suggestion, I have read the text of Senate 2809 - a bill to establish six regional centers of excellence in drug abuse research and education.

The intent is admirable and the mission necessary. But the bill has two major flaws - it defines the centers on a regional basis; and in the text, allows the assignment to possibly be made by the White House.

Selection of centers on a regional basis will inhibit the development of centers in proximity to each other; and encourage some to develop where no experience exists. If one center is encouraged in the far West, should it be in Los Angeles, Palo Alto, or Portland - three active research centers? In New York, should it be at the New York Medical College, Downstate Medical Center, Albert Einstein Medical Center or SUNY at Stony Brook - each center now having active programs and fine leaders?

The present Senate Bill, S2097, provides for a transfer of authority from NIMH to the White House. This transfer, for research and education, is fraught with the hazard that the White House will encourage political appointees without adequate regard for scientific experience. It will be a handicap to the present research efforts in drug abuse, alcoholism, and psychopharmacology to have the authority for research transferred to the limited team assembled there now. The good intentions of S2809 will be subject to political considerations, independent of excellence of centers, and will not achieve the results wished for if authority is in the White House.

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Is it not true that the mechanisms for the results anticipated by S2809 already exist in the program grants and the career awards of the National Institute of Mental Health? Perhaps the easiest way to achieve the mission is to allocate additional, earmarked funds for drug abuse research and training (~~not~~ on a regional basis). Indeed, the limitations in the present programmatic support is the shortage of funds, not the shortage of applicants or ideas.

Should you wish to discuss these comments in public or in camera, I can be reached at 212-369-7900.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry

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cc: Senator H. Hughes, Iowa  
Senator J. Javits, New York