

Open Letter to Members of the Association from Robert E. Lane, President

February 1971

Dear Colleague:

I would like to use this opportunity to invite you to help me answer a question that has just been addressed to me. In effect, the question is this: how has basic political science research produced the knowledge by which man has improved his condition? The question is contained in a letter from Dr. W. D. McElroy, the Director of the National Science Foundation, who has asked the same question of the presidents of the social science (and perhaps other) professional associations. The NSF will find the answers to these questions useful in answering queries from members of Congress and others; but they are questions that deserve consideration in their own right and that interest me a great deal.

Your answers to this query (with citations) however short, will help us to provide the NSF and ourselves with a case for political science. Further, they might provide the basis of an interesting article for *PS*. To help you with the task, I am providing a copy of the entire text of Dr. McElroy's letter below.

Dear Dr. Lane:

One problem all of us in science have struggled with over the years is the demonstration by case of the payoff of basic scientific research. Every government science administrator has had the problem, and it is one which is likely to continue, especially since basic research depends so heavily upon public funds.

In short, the federal investment in scientific research must continuously and properly be justified. You are in a position to help.

We need assistance in identifying examples of how basic research has contributed to the solution of problems facing society, how such research has produced the knowledge by which man has improved his condition, and how knowledge of himself and his surroundings has enabled man to learn to live more productively.

I feel the heads of professional scientific societies are in a unique position to help identify examples of the value of basic research. We would like to have any suggestions you may offer within your discipline or sphere of

experience, or any general observations you may wish to offer.

We can best show our appreciation of your response by making constructive use of your contribution. I shall appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

W. D. McElroy
Director,
National Science Foundation

As I have said before, I believe the Association might help to serve as an information broker so that the fruits of research of the kind reported on might be more readily available in shaping humane and effective public policies. Your ideas on this aspect of the question will be welcome to me, though not requested by Dr. McElroy's letter. Please send your responses to me at APSA.

Thank you for your help. The Council and I have found your previous responses most valuable.

Robert E. Lane
President