

★

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Department of Chemistry
February 25, 1958

Mr. Ward Ross
Managing Director
Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation
506 N. Walnut Street
Madison 5, Wisconsin

Dear Ward:

I was disturbed to hear you say, during our discussion last week, that the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation is considering a change in policy in its relationship with the faculty. I believe that this relationship has been exceedingly successful so far, and I should hate to see it imperiled in any way. I feel so strongly about this matter that I am taking the liberty of setting forth my views, which, I think, reflect those of a large proportion of the faculty members who are actively engaged in research.

Natural scientists who go into academic work do so at a substantial financial sacrifice; their compensation being complete freedom in research. This freedom is therefore of paramount importance to them and it is not for sale. Some industrial firms do try to buy cheap research by making deals with academic people, but this form of exploitation is generally unsuccessful, in good universities, because offers to support research, which also imply any obligation, are declined.

The money that WARF has made available to the University has never had any implication of strings attached, and I firmly believe that the success of WARF has been due in large part to this rigid hands off policy. By dealing with private industry an inventor can generally realize about five times the personal gain to be had by dealing with WARF. Why then, do so many faculty members come to WARF with their discoveries? Because they want to help perpetuate WARF as it now functions. Even a slight change in policy that might be construed by the faculty as solicitation, could have rather serious consequences. I believe that those

Mr. Ward Ross

-2-

2-25-58

very faculty members that WARF is most interested in supporting would be the first to go elsewhere for help, if any obligation were implied, and they would also go elsewhere with their discoveries. The failure of a number of other universities in their attempts to establish successful foundations has been in large part due to their failure to emulate the WARF policies. Some of my friends at other universities have an extremely bitter attitude toward their institutions because of a feeling of being exploited.

The WARF money has been in large measure responsible for attracting top flight scientists to, and retaining them on the staff of the University of Wisconsin. Without this agency Wisconsin would, in my opinion, be only a second rate institution. WARF has been the main benefactor of science at Wisconsin not only because of the magnitude of its support, but because of the way it has given this support. I earnestly hope that extremely cautious deliberation be given before any changes in policy are seriously entertained.

Sincerely yours,

William S. Johnson

WSJ:gml