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MEETING WITH ROBERT McCONNELL
re: Solar Energy
Thursday, September 11, 1975
4:00 p.m.

Mr. Cannon's Office

ROBERT A. McCONNELL
ATTORNEY AT LAW
2721 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE, SUITE 802
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85004
(602) 277-4474

September 8, 1975

James M. Cannon
Executive Director
Domestic Council
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: National Solar Energy Research Institute

Dear Jim:

The August 25th Wall Street Journal's comments and concerns expressed over the ability of the Council to do its job were sincerely appreciated. Certainly I do not want to take as much time as the coyote issue. However, a brief update of Arizona understandings on the above cited project does follow.

Last June we discussed and then corresponded regarding the timetable for site selection of the Solar Energy Institute. At that time it was understood that the final National Academy of Sciences' report was to be submitted no later than September 30th, however, ERDA clearly anticipated knowing the Academy's views well ahead of that time.

As you may know, the Academy's report will not be in until the latter part of September and the Academy is not keeping ERDA advised on the development of Academy thinking. The end result is that ERDA has experienced some slippage in the timetable they originally established for Institute site selection.

Partly as a result of this, current in-house ERDA thinking is that no formal request for proposals will be issued once site selection criteria are established. It is felt that a formal request for proposals establishes a far too structured process that requires too much rigidity and too long a timetable.

Our understanding is that ERDA is envisioning an informal type of process wherein they publish their site selection guidelines and state that the government is planning to consider sites. The scenario that will follow would leave this "request" open for forty-five days. During that time, states or other entities interested in submitting proposals would do so. Ostensibly, ERDA

ROBERT A. MCCONNELL
ATTORNEY AT LAW

would only be considering a site (general location). Once that site was selected, ERDA would handle details as to land, type of structure, and all other specifics that would be required for the Institute.

We are most interested in whether this particular change will in fact become the official course of action.

In addition, we wonder whether, if a more informal approach is to be utilized, the White House involvement in the sensitive site selection decision will be minimized if not eliminated.

If you can provide any information relative to this subject, it would be very greatly appreciated.

One final question relates to my understanding that the Domestic Council has suggested that the Solar Institute's professional staff members be employed for a maximum period of five years. The purpose would be to keep the organization fresh and viable by forcing turnover. Is my understanding correct? If so, has the Council developed any other opinions or suggestions regarding the Institute?

Best personal regards.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Robert A. McConnell

RAM/st


cc: Congressman John Rhodes


THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 11, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: JIM CANNON

THROUGH: JIM CAVANAUGH 

FROM: GLENN SCHLEEDE 

SUBJECT: SOLAR ENERGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
(SERI)

The following information is provided in response to your request for the status report on this subject:

As I indicated during our telephone conversation, the competition for the proposed SERI is already intense and will increase. At least fifteen states have expressed interest.

ERDA's staff have evolved in their thinking toward an institute located at a single site with small field stations located in various places around the country. This concept has not yet been approved at an ERDA policy level.

ERDA has contracted with the National Academy of Sciences for a study leading to recommendations as to the role and mission of the institute and site selection criteria. That report is due on September 25 but may slip.

At urging from OMB and me, ERDA is also obtaining recommendations from industry. They are being collected and analyzed under a contract with MITRE Corporation. This is due around October 13 and may slip.

At this point, there is no mutual understanding between ERDA and OMB on funding levels for the proposed institute, though ERDA's staff have let it be known that

they are thinking of something that would grow to about \$50 million annually.

Tab A is ERDA's tentative schedule for reaching decisions on the proposed institute. Bob Seamans is anxious that this schedule not be divulged at this time.

The last paragraph of Mr. McConnell's letter refers to a "Domestic Council" recommendation that staff members of the institute be employed for a maximum period of five years. That statement is something of a misunderstanding of an offhand question that I posed to ERDA staff. I asked what precautions they were taking against the laboratory "growing old" -- a problem that has plagued ERDA's national laboratories.

In view of your meeting with Mr. McConnell, I assume the attached letter need not be answered. If you do wish a formal response, would you please let me know.

Attachment

TAB A

ERDA's TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR REACHING DECISIONS ON
A PROPOSED SOLAR ENERGY INSTITUTE (SERI)

- September 8 - Appointment of an ERDA project manager for SERI project.
- September 25 - Decision by ERDA as to whether the proposals to be entertained will deal only with the geographic location or with the management and organization structure and location.
- September 25 - Receive report from National Academy of Sciences which recommend (a) role of the laboratory (b) mission, and (c) site selection criteria.
- October 13 - Receipt of report from MITRE Corporation which will summarize views from industry on the same issues addressed by the Academy.
- November 3 - Dissemination of guidelines and site selection criteria in Federal Register.
- December 12 - Deadline for proposal submissions.
- December 12 to March 8 - Site visits, evaluation of proposals.
- March 8 - Source and Site Evaluation board will recommend rankings of proposals to the Administrator.
- March 8 to March 31 - Administrator evaluates.
- March 31 - Administrator announces decision.