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Remarks of K. S. Pitzer to the Trustees of Stanford University in
opening discussion of the future relationship of Stanford Research
Institute to the University, April 8, 1968

In a recent memorandum I said that the SRI question would constitute a "once in a decade" decision. That is certainly true, but I want to add, in opening the discussion, that you face a set of decisions which are really symbolic of a major national and international crisis. This crisis is the lack of confidence of many students in the controlling elements of our society. You are in a very real sense symbolic of the President of the United States, of his Cabinet, and of the majority coalition in the Congress. You are being held responsible for the war in Vietnam, for the draft, for our failure to find a way to stop the nuclear arms race, for the oil leak in the Santa Barbara channel. Since young people have known only prosperity, you get little credit for continued economic growth. Mistakes are made in any decade, but I share the view that our recent record is exceptionally dismal. The Ford Motor Company blundered in the Edsel but had the courage to admit the error and stop production. The war in Vietnam is an equally obvious and infinitely greater blunder, but we haven't the courage to admit it and get out. And in my view it is a clearly a violation of human rights to draft a young man to fight a war which he regards as grossly immoral and about which the nation is unsure.

I am tempted to call this a generation gap, but Walter Lippmann, nearly 80, recognized what was wrong. The recent speech entitled, "a generation in search of a future," by George Wald, age 63, is an excellent statement of these problems which I hope you read in last Sunday's San Francisco Chronicle or elsewhere. It is possible for our generation to see what is wrong.

You are being asked through your decision on SRI to say that our national priorities are wrong - that we spend too much on the military, on means to kill people, and not enough on constructive things, on helping ordinary people to live.

I hope that you will listen carefully to student and faculty views on both specific questions related to SRI and on these general questions of confidence and priorities. I think I am correct in saying the great majority of the students and faculty are concerned about the points I have raised. I hope you can take some action today that will indicate your concern - that will symbolize your recognition of these problems.

You can criticize inappropriate student behavior, of course. Some of you faced an unfair inquisition a month ago. In yesterday's Daily, Tom Dawson properly objected to the current effort of some students to judge the SRI questions before instead of after the study committee report is published.

Also the university should not take official positions on matters which are not its concern - to do otherwise would jeopardize academic freedom. Thus you should not pass formal resolutions on national policy questions even if you were inclined to do so.

But there are appropriate ways in which you can indicate a desire to recognize and consider campus viewpoints. One would be a clear step toward adding Trustees who would personally hold typical student and faculty viewpoints. Another would be a decision-making procedure concerning SRI which indicated a clear desire to learn and to consider seriously campus viewpoints. I am sure other suggestions will be forthcoming - some will be unacceptable but I hope you can find others which you can adopt. Regardless of the errors of others I hope you can take a step toward renewed confidence.