

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 20, 2010

Dr. Amy Gutmann  
President and Christopher H. Browne  
Distinguished Professor of Political Science  
University of Pennsylvania  
1 College Hall, Room 100  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6380

Dear Dr. Gutmann,

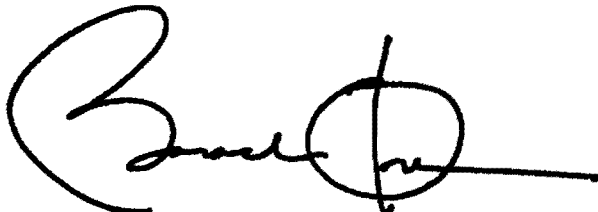
As you know, scientists have announced a milestone in the emerging field of cellular and genetic research known as synthetic biology. While scientists have used DNA to develop genetically modified cells for many years, for the first time, all of the natural genetic material in a bacterial cell has been replaced with a synthetic set of genes. This development raises the prospect of important benefits, such as the ability to accelerate vaccine development. At the same time, it raises genuine concerns, and so we must consider carefully the implications of this research.

I therefore request that the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues undertake, as its first order of business, a study of the implications of this scientific milestone, as well as other advances that may lie ahead in this field of research. In its study, the Commission should consider the potential medical, environmental, security, and other benefits of this field of research, as well as any potential health, security or other risks. Further, the Commission should develop recommendations about any actions the Federal government should take to ensure that America reaps the benefits of this developing field of science while identifying appropriate ethical boundaries and minimizing identified risks. My Science and Technology Advisor, Dr. John P. Holdren, will be in communication with you about the scope and progress of your study.

I ask that the Commission complete its study within six months and provide me with a report with its findings, as well as any recommendations and suggestions for future study that the Commission deems appropriate. Given the importance of this issue, I request that the Commission consult with a range of constituencies, including scientific and medical communities, faith communities, and business and non-profit organizations.

It is vital that we as a society consider, in a thoughtful manner, the significance of this kind of scientific development. With the Commission's collective expertise in the areas of science, policy, and ethical and religious values, I am confident that it will carry out this responsibility with the care and attention it deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".