

THE OBSERVATORIES

OF THE CARNEGIE INSTITUTION OF WASHINGTON

November 14, 2005

Dr. William Smith
AURA
1200 New York Avenue, NW
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Bill,

This letter is in regard to AURA's role in the development of a Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope. AURA has a prominent role in this important development, carried out with National Science Foundation funds in the New Initiatives Office of the National Optical Astronomy Observatories. We think it is vital and useful that the NOAO be involved in the development of this major new capability, and we applaud the initiative and drive that characterizes the NIO. The very useful report from Rolf Kudritzki's Committee is an example of AURA's leadership at its best.

The NOAO submission to the National Science Foundation for its Senior Review makes clear that work on the GSMT will grow to be a large portion of the activity of NOAO during the balance of this decade. The message to the NSF is evident: AURA/NOAO is best able to manage the publicly funded portion of the development of the GSMT. We do not take issue with this message in this letter.

We do have an important issue with the AURA effort, however, which we bring now to your attention. AURA has already "picked the winner" of NSF support between the two GSMT projects: the overwhelming majority of the effort at NOAO is exclusively focused on the Thirty Meter Telescope project. A smaller portion has been invested in community-wide activities, most prominently the Kudritzki Committee. None of the effort at NOAO is in direct support of the Giant Magellan Telescope. This decision happened without any of the normal and customary processes of review that should precede an important decision, well in advance of the moment suggested in the Pilachowski Report (indeed, before that report was written). This is highly inappropriate.

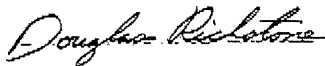
We are writing this letter as members of the Board of the Giant Magellan Telescope. We include two current and one former members of the AURA Board. There was minimal discussion in the AURA Board of this decision, and it has not been revisited at subsequent meetings. (There has been discussion of the NSF proposal, and we anticipate that some modest but welcome funding for the GMT will soon become available.) The matter of balance in the efforts at NOAO for the development of a GSMT should be revisited, and we insist that a balanced approach be implemented.

It is not clear what process would best respond to our position. We suggest that you consult with Jeremy Mould and respond to us with a proposed process that will lead to the proper inclusion of the GMT in the NIO. We are excited by this prospect!

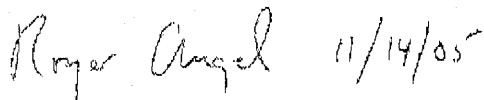
Sincerely,
The GMT Board



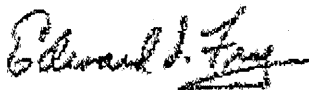
Charles Alcock, Director, CfA Harvard-Smithsonian



Douglas Richstone, Chair, Dept of Astronomy, University of Michigan



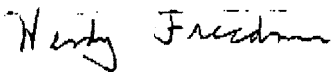
Roger Angel, Director, Steward Observatory, University of Arizona



Edward S. Fry, Professor and Head Physics Dept., Texas A&M University



Mary Ann Rankin, Dean, The University of Texas at Austin



Wendy Freedman, Crawford H. Greenewalt Chair, Director, Carnegie Observatories

cc.: Jeremy Mould ✓