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From: aasmembers-bounces@as.org [<mailto:aasmembers-bounces@as.org>] On Behalf Of AAS Members

Sent: Friday, October 05, 2012 10:23 AM

To: aasmembers@as.org

Subject: [AAS Members] AAS Informational Email 2012-09

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Subject: AAS Statement on the NSF Portfolio Review

For more than fifty years, the Astronomical Sciences have set a standard for responsible stewardship of public resources. Each decade, the community reviews the current state of the disciplines of astronomy and astrophysics, planetary science, and heliophysics and produces a prioritized list of projects, programs and initiatives important for scientific progress in the coming decade. The AAS strongly supports the principle of making such decadal recommendations and works to have them implemented as part of its mission to enhance and share humanity's scientific understanding of the Universe. These grand aspirations are now being pursued in a changing fiscal environment that is likely to see severe constraints on federal research expenditures.

As a consequence, the Astronomical Sciences Division of the National Science Foundation convened a committee to review its complete portfolio of facilities and programs. The Portfolio Review Committee report provides a thorough and detailed audit of the nation's ground-based resources in light of the scientific priorities set forth by the Decadal Surveys. Their recommended balance of large, medium, and small-scale efforts highlights the need to maintain sufficient funds to support individual investigators, to continue a program of technical innovation, and to train the next generation of scientists, while also funding those facilities essential for addressing the decadal surveys' scientific priorities.

The AAS supports such community involvement in the hard decisions imposed on us by the current trend of diminishing federal investment in the nation's future scientific capacity, a trend we regard as unwise. The Astronomical Sciences Division's diminished projected budget cannot both initiate the new projects envisioned by the decadal surveys, and operate the entire current suite of ground-based facilities. These national facilities, available to all solely on the basis of scientific merit, are essential to keeping the astronomical community strong and diverse. Curtailment of access will have a major negative impact on many in our active research community. Even if some public-access facilities can be converted to private ownership, smaller programs will be disproportionately challenged, producing a negative impact on the training of a diverse scientific workforce.

The Portfolio Review presents an opportunity for a new dialog with the leadership of the NSF and other federal agencies, along with the Executive and Legislative branches, on the value to the nation of their investments in the astronomical sciences. The recent surveys -- New Worlds, New Horizons in Astronomy and Astrophysics, Vision and Voyages for Planetary Science, and Solar and Space Physics: A Science for a Technological Society -- aptly noted that astronomy is a key "gateway science", promoting growth in the K-16 STEM pipeline which, in turn, helps to build the innovation economy. If, however, the NSF budget projections become our reality, the Portfolio Review has both provided a framework for developing creative new arrangements for facility operations and opened important new pathways for innovative mid-scale projects by advocating divestment rather than closure of lower-ranked facilities, by explicitly recognizing the importance of co-tenants and work in progress, and by recommending some restructuring of grant programs.

The operation of new and existing world-class facilities, coupled with robust support for the individual scientists and engineers -- including those in training -- who will use these facilities in charting the future of our science, will impose hard choices of the kind the Review Committee has recommended. The AAS stands ready to help support the transitions required, while working to promote continued US leadership in the exploration of the Universe and the understanding of our place in it.

Adopted 24 September 2012

AASMembers mailing list

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