



May 10, 2005

Dr. G. W. Van Citters
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Dear Wayne:

As Principal Investigators of the cooperative agreements under which NSF's astronomy facilities operate, we received your letters announcing the plans for the Senior Review. We understand your goal of examining the balance of investments in the various facilities supported by the Astronomy Division and we are all developing the inputs for the review, as requested. We also understand and commend your commitment to seek community input at all stages. We have discussed the review and believe that at this stage, there is a need to establish a clear, transparent process which we all understand and which can achieve community confidence.

Some questions that should be addressed in terms of process are:

- Which AST current commitments will be considered on or off the table? We know that input has been solicited from NOAO, NSO, Gemini, NAIC and NRAO. We also understand that the unrestricted grants program (AAG) is off the table. However, a great many other elements such as the University Radio Observatory program, the Telescope System Instrumentation Program, NSF research centers such as the Adaptive Optics Center, and other parts of the NSF AST portfolio may be considered. It is important to understand how these will be represented and considered.
- How will the membership of the Senior Review Panel be selected to ensure an unbiased process without conflicts of interest? What will be the community's role in the Panel selection process?
- How will the charge to the Senior Review Panel and the "well-understood criteria" to be used reflect the recommendations of the Decadal Survey? When will we see the charge and criteria, and how will the community be able to comment on them?
- How will the review itself be conducted? Will the facilities be able to present material to the Panel? If the Panel is to be given a set of budgetary scenarios, how will the facility managers respond to Panel questions about the implications of those scenarios for their facility? How will the community be able to provide

comments to the Panel and by what process will the community be involved in reviewing the draft recommendations?

Again, we understand the importance of taking responsible action to address the severe budget limitations we all face at the current time. We look forward to working with NSF and the astronomy community to optimize the science NSF will be able to support in the near future and minimize long-term damage to the research infrastructure.

As an aid to our preparations, we would appreciate receiving your answers to these questions as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Joseph A. Burns
Vice Provost, Physical Sciences and Engineering
Cornell University



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