

ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES FOR RESEARCH IN ASTRONOMY, INC.



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October 29, 2008

Professor Roger Blandford
Chair Astro2010 Decadal Survey Committee
Stanford University
SLAC M/S 75
2575 Sand Hill Rd.
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Professor Blandford,

We are writing as members of the Solar Observatory Council (SOC), AURA's scientific management and oversight body for the National Solar Observatory. As you may know, AURA's National Solar Observatory is the largest scientific organization devoted to supporting the US ground-based solar research community. Approximately six months ago, the SOC initiated discussions with the solar community about the pending Decadal Survey. This process has resulted in a report by a broadly-based scientific steering committee. We charged this committee to consider the exciting solar science questions of the next decade and the ground-based facilities that would enable breakthroughs.

In advance of the full report of our steering committee, we wish to emphasize that the Advanced Technology Solar Telescope (ATST) remains the core priority for ground-based solar astronomy now and for the next decade. The ATST is essential to the vitality of US solar research. The National Solar Observatory is fully committed to the ATST which will be its flagship facility, and we reaffirm our community's undiminished support for this transformational facility. Since the ATST has been approved by the National Science Board and is now in the final stage of the NSF MREFC (Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction) process, our expectation is that the ATST will not be reprioritized.

The AURA/SOC Decadal Survey report is currently being reviewed and will soon be transmitted to the Decadal Survey Committee. It will provide the scientific context for the ATST and the new research it enables, and discuss how priorities for solar astronomy may most effectively be established and acted upon in the age of the ATST.

Sincerely,

Members of the AURA Solar Observatory Council

Tom Ayres, Vice Chair, *University of Colorado*

Yvonne Elsworth, *University of Birmingham*

Sarah Gibson, *High Altitude Observatory*

William Gibson, *Southwest Research Institute*

Todd Hoeksema, *Stanford University*

Jeffrey Kuhn, Chair, *University of Hawaii*

Dana Longcope, *Montana State University*

William Smith, *AURA*

Oskar von der Luehe, *Kiepenheuer-Institut für Sonnenphysik*

Rene Walterbos, *New Mexico State University*