

Dr. Craig Foltz
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Division of Astronomical Sciences
4201 Wilson Blvd
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Dear Craig,

At our Observatories Council meeting last week, we were informed about the Continuing Resolution and its ramifications for the budget and operations of NOAO. As you are aware, this has been a difficult year for Kitt Peak and Cerro Tololo. The NSF Senior Review made specific recommendations about improving infrastructure and access to more telescope time for the community. The observatories formulated plans to make the recommendations happen and then the increased funding was delayed for a year. Now, the continuation of a flat budget and the uncertainty of not knowing when or if the President's budget will be approved puts the entire nighttime operation of our federal facilities in jeopardy. Since the majority of the budget is in salaries and inflation causes these to rise regardless of what the budget is, the observatories are faced with decreased staff at a time when the NSF and the community have put high priority on increased support at our mountain facilities. This also severely affects the morale of the Observatories staff, who were looking forward to more certainty after years of decline.

Thus, as in times in the past, we hope that you and your colleagues at NSF can negotiate a Continuing Resolution with Exception for NSF. This would allow NOAO to function normally until Congress and the new administration can resolve the 2009 budget.

Regards,

Paula Szkody, Chair

Observatory Council

Josh Bloom, Anita Cochran, Andrea Dupree, Deidre Hunter, Hernan Quintana, William Smith, Tony Tyson, Fred Walter, Frank Winkler, Dennis Zaritsky