

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

November 13, 2017

Dr. France A. Córdova
Director
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue,
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Director Córdova:

I write to request a meeting with you in the coming days to discuss the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the proposed changes to the National Science Foundation's (Foundation) long-standing relationship with the Green Bank Observatory (Observatory). While I understand the challenges the Foundation faces in the current budget climate, I remain very concerned that the agency preferred alternative would not only create a major void in the field of national and international scientific research, it could devastate local West Virginia communities and the state at large.

For 60 years the Foundation, Pocahontas County, and the state of West Virginia have supported the ability of innumerable national and international scientists to make discoveries about our Universe using the capabilities located at the Observatory within the National Radio Quiet Zone. Over this time, the local communities have made sacrifices to keep the surrounding area radio-silent to ensure that the activities at the Observatory can continue without interference. As we look to the future, I believe that the Observatory's contributions to national and international science and the West Virginia commitment to this work justifies the Foundation's strong, continued full-time support and presence at the Observatory. I strongly oppose the proposed arbitrary 21 week implementation period for demolition, mothballing, and/or self-abandonment, and I believe that the Foundation has a responsibility to identify and secure additional partners before effecting any changes to the infrastructure or funding support at the Observatory.

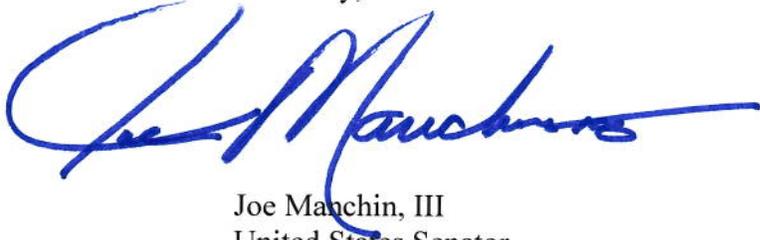
The November 8, 2017 DEIS indicates that the Foundation's preferred Alternative is "Action Alternative A: Collaboration with Interested Parties for Continued Science- and Education-focused Operations with Reduced NSF funding." Unfortunately, the DEIS does not provide sufficient detail about the business case to demonstrate that this alternative has long-term viability. I am disappointed that the Foundation did not include a discussion of the unique and groundbreaking work that the national and global science community can accomplish by using the Observatory's facilities that would be affected if the preferred alternative is adopted. In 2017 alone, there have been over 30 scientific publications that are a result of work conducted at the Observatory. The two White Papers listed below provide additional information about the critical work being performed at this facility today, and they highlight the tremendous loss it would be to the scientific community if operations at the Observatory were curtailed.

- Bally, J. et al., The Case For A Publicly Available, Well-Instrumented GBT Operating At 20-115 GHz¹.
- Lockman, F.J., et al., The National Science Foundation's AST Portfolio Review of 2012 is Not Relevant to the Green Bank Telescope of 2017: A White Paper

In addition to the November 30th community meeting, I would like to request a separate public meeting that could provide the global science community with the opportunity to provide input via video-teleconference or other capabilities about the impact that the proposed changes will have on their research. If you cannot host such a meeting at your facilities, I would be honored to host such a meeting in collaboration with you from West Virginia.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and I look forward to our discussions. Please contact Lance West on my staff to arrange this meeting who can be reached at 202-224-3954.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin, III
United States Senator

Cc:
Chairman Thad Cochran
Chairman Richard Shelby
Senator Patrick Leahy
Senator Jeanne Shaheen

¹ <http://greenbankobservatory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/GBT-High-Frequency.pdf>