

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

COMMITTEES  
APPROPRIATIONS  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
INTELLIGENCE  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

May 1, 2018

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

The Honorable James F. Bridenstine  
Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space  
Administration  
300 E Street S.W  
Washington, D.C. 20546

Dear Dr. Córdoba and Administrator Bridenstine,

I write to draw your attention to an important provision I fought to ensure was included in the Fiscal Year 2018 omnibus appropriations bill that impacts both the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the important partnerships your organizations have with the Green Bank Observatory (Observatory) in West Virginia. This facility is critically important to the federal government and the entire international scientific community, and we must work together to protect and preserve the unique capabilities housed at this world class facility.

For over 60 years, the federal government, the state of West Virginia, and Pocahontas County have supported the ability of innumerable national and international scientists to make groundbreaking discoveries about our universe through the Observatory. The local communities have also made significant sacrifices over that time to keep the surrounding area radio-silent so that the Observatory can continue to operate without interference. Unfortunately, on November 8, 2017, NSF released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that identified NSF's preferred alternative to be "Action Alternative A: Collaboration with Interested Parties for Continued Science- and Education-focused Operations with Reduced NSF Funding".

I remain staunchly opposed to this proposal and was pleased that the House report accompanying the Department of Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill included the following language concerning astronomy assets including the Observatory:

*"The Committee expects NSF to sustain support for the programs and scientific facilities funded by the Astronomical Sciences Division at no less than the fiscal year 2017 levels to maintain full scientific and educational operations. NSF shall not implement any final divestment of infrastructure tied to the findings of its 2012 Astronomical Sciences Portfolio Review without first reporting such actions to the Committee. Further, any such actions shall be carried out in accordance with relevant reprogramming requirements and new language directing Committee notification prior to disposal of assets. The Committee is aware that NSF is working with Federal, academic and private sector partners to develop plans to share future operations and maintenance costs of NSF astronomical infrastructure. NSF shall keep the Committee informed of these activities"*<sup>1</sup>

While I continue to believe that NSF has a responsibility to identify and secure additional partners before effecting any changes to the infrastructure or funding support at the Observatory, I am also willing to pursue new partnership opportunities that support the ongoing work at the facility and position it well for continued growth in the future.

At my request, the following language was included in the Senate report accompanying the Department of Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill:

*“NASA is encouraged to continue its use of [Green Bank] to support its Planetary Science Research program, including orbital debris monitoring activities, and to coordinate with NSF and other government agencies to develop potential multi-agency management plans for [Green Bank].”<sup>2</sup>*

In hopes of ensuring that our implementation efforts are coordinated and consistent, I request a meeting with you and the senior staff within both of your organizations to discuss the next steps in this process. I also extend a personal invitation to you and your senior staff to come visit this facility and see first-hand the important work being conducted at the Observatory.

As you may know, the Observatory recently partnered with the Hubble Space Telescope and U.S.-based astronomy researchers to better understand how stars are born in the Milky Way. This is just the latest example of the unparalleled research opportunities the Observatory has to offer, and I am excited to discuss the various ways in which it can support the critical missions of your two organizations. I look forward to working with you to develop new partnership opportunities that will provide long-term certainty to both the international scientific community and the thousands of West Virginians that have sacrificed so many modern amenities to make this work possible.

With Warmest Regards,



Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

---

<sup>1</sup> House of Representatives Report 115-231, “Commerce Justice and Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2018,” July 17, 2017: p. 68, 70 (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-115hrpt231/pdf/CRPT-115hrpt231.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Senate Report 115-139, “Departments of Commerce Justice and Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2018,” July 27, 2017: p. 105 (<https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/srpt139/CRPT-115srpt139.pdf>)