

ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES FOR RESEARCH IN ASTRONOMY, INC.



July 7, 2011

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OPERATING FOR THE
NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Gemini Observatory
La Serena, Chile & Hilo, Hawaii

National Optical Astronomy Observatory
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National Solar Observatory
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OPERATING FOR THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS
AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

Space Telescope Science Institute
Baltimore, Maryland

MEMBERS/SINCE:

Boston University 1993
California Institute of Technology 1972
Carnegie Institution of Washington 1997
Fisk University 2010
Georgia State University 2008
Harvard University 1957
Indiana University 1957
Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias 2005
Iowa State University 1992
Johns Hopkins University 1982
Kiepenheuer-Institut für Sonnenphysik 2005
Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1981
Michigan State University 1997
Montana State University 2005
New Jersey Institute of Technology 2010
New Mexico State University 1999
Ohio State University 1957
Pennsylvania State University 1990
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile 1997
Princeton University 1959
Rutgers University 1999
Stony Brook University 1986
Swinburne University 2008
Tohoku University 2010
Universidad de Chile 1992
University of Arizona 1972
University of California Berkeley 2007
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University of Florida 2002
University of Hawaii 1978
University of Illinois 1980
University of Maryland 1986
University of Michigan 1957
University of Minnesota 1995
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 1995
University of Texas at Austin 1972
University of Toronto 2004
University of Virginia 2003
University of Washington 1986
University of Wisconsin 1957
Vanderbilt University 2010
Yale University 1958

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-307, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers,

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA) to express my concern over the proposed termination of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). AURA is a consortium of 45 major universities with research interests in the highly competitive field of astronomy and astrophysics. For over twenty years, AURA has conducted the science operations for the Hubble Space Telescope and we have participated in the planning for its successor, JWST.

This is a time when the Administration, the Congress and the public are examining the future of NASA and the prospect of losing our lead in human spaceflight. Against this backdrop, it would be tragic for the Congress to curtail our lead in space science as well. JWST is the centerpiece of NASA's astrophysics program and will be 100 times more powerful than the Hubble Telescope. There is no planned mission by NASA or any other nation that can achieve the science and inspirational goals of JWST. US leadership in science and space is linked to JWST.

An independent review of JWST last year confirmed the value of the investment to date, the excellence of the technology, and recommended a viable path for NASA to correct the identified project management deficiencies. NASA and its contractors have aggressively responded and NASA will formalize the new plan in preparation for the FY13 budget preparation.

The 21-foot diameter primary mirror, the most critical element of the observatory and the largest mirror ever built for space, has already been produced. Overall 75% of the hardware is in fabrication. NASA will fully complete their re-plan this summer with budget estimates that should lead to a launch as soon as 2018. I urge you to reconsider the proposed termination until a full agency wide plan is brought forward.

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As the budget process moves forward this year, the Congress and Administration will need to consider a wide variety of measures to address the nation's fiscal problems. It is profoundly unwise to sacrifice our nation's lead in space science in achieving this goal. JWST is of the utmost scientific importance for the future of astronomy, and a valuable symbol of NASA's role in advancing US technology. I hope that the final action for this year's appropriation bill can reinstate JWST.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William S. Smith, Jr.", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

William S. Smith, Jr.
President

cc. Honorable Norman Dicks
Ranking Democratic Member