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Please support TMT, astronomy

By BARRY K. TANIGUCHI

Dear friends and family: I am writing to ask for your help to make the Thirty Meter Telescope a reality and help preserve astronomy as an asset to our community.

I have been working on this for more than 18 years, serving 12 years on the Maunakea Management Board. Working together with a diverse group of community leaders, all volunteering significant time and energy, I believe that we've corrected many of the mistakes in the management of, the community engagement with, and the recognition of the deep sacredness of Maunakea that have occurred in the past. But I would be the first to acknowledge that we still have some ways to go.

I believe Maunakea and the astronomy program should be administratively based on Hawaii Island. The mountain is here, the telescopes are here, and the astronomy program is here. The community here is best situated to make TMT into an asset for Hawaii Island and the state.

TMT is a \$2 billion project funded internationally. It has already given our community \$5.8 million in grants and will bring 140 jobs and \$26 million in positive annual economic activity to Hawaii Island. We may never have an opportunity this big again.

Recently, I attended the Japanese Chamber's Goji Kara pau hana at the Institute for Astronomy with a good friend. He saw an infrared radiation sensor they invented. Each sensor, which can be held in one hand, cost \$1 million. These sensors are put in space telescopes and are called the Hawaii Array. It can detect infrared radiation from the creation of the universe.

He saw a picture of the galaxies from the beginning of space and time, and he thought that it was as close to a picture of the Absolute that we could see. Seeing his excitement made me remember what we have here and what we could lose — a cutting edge, truly world class program of astronomy more than 50 years in the making, which provides 300 to 400 jobs and \$88 million in positive annual economic activity.

Just several weeks ago, the combined power of a global network of telescopes, including two on Maunakea which pioneered the technology to link the telescopes, took the first picture of a black hole 54 million light years from Earth. The black hole was given a Hawaiian name, "Powehi," which means "embellished dark source of unending creation." The achievement made international news. Without the TMT, astronomy here will become second class.

The divisiveness in our community over this project saddens me greatly, but I continue to support it because the mission of the TMT to explore the universe is a sacred one that accords with the sacredness of Maunakea and the great Hawaiian tradition of voyaging. Leimomi Lum, kahuna nui of the Mo'okini heiau, said "I believe totally in getting the new telescope built on

Maunakea. Our ancestors studied the heavens. Now a new generation of Hawaiians can have the opportunity to advance what they discovered. A telescope that can accomplish this maintains the sacredness of the mountain. With this and in other ways, we need to be open to the future to carry us forward to the many tomorrows yet to come."

Building TMT will also reduce the net footprint on the mountain, because as part of the agreement, three working observatories will be taken down.

I fear things will come down to a confrontation on the mountain between the rule of law and democracy against people believing in the sacredness of Maunakea. But what could be more sacred than exploring the vastness and the origins of the universe? I pray that no one is hurt if protesters have to be physically removed to follow the rule of law.

I hope that we can agree to disagree without labelling each other as bad or resorting to violence. There have been many public hearings, a Hawaii Supreme Court ruling to safeguard the legal process which resulted in a new round of hearings, an independent hearing officer deciding to approve the permit for TMT, and a poll showing that more than 70 percent of the community supports the project.

I'm writing this because I hope that if the silent majority voice their feelings, it will be clear that the community believes that TMT is in their best interest, and our voice will be heard and respected by our friends and family.

Sometimes, it's hard to take a stand when others whom you know are sincerely and strongly opposed, but I hope you will join me to support astronomy and TMT for the sake of our community and future.

In particular, it would help if you email your opinion to Mayor Kim (harry.kim@hawaiicounty.gov) and Gov. Ige (info@davidige.org). Both support TMT, but they may be heartened to know that the community is behind them.

Thank you very much.

Barry K. Taniguchi is chairman and CEO of KTA Super Stores.



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