April 14, 2015

University of Hawai‘i-Board of Regents

Aloha Members of the University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents,

I am a proud graduate of this fine institution’s West O‘ahu campus, class of 2007, and a contributing member of my community. Above all, I am an exemplary mother and citizen and a change agent for the communities that span the areas that my ‘ohana and I live in, my keiki attend school, and where we work and play— that encompasses, all of Hawai‘i nei. First and foremost, I see myself as an agent of change with the fortified goal of normalizing ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in Wai‘anae. I successfully got 30 families interested in registering for introductory and second year levels of Hawaiian Language courses with the intention of registering each and everyone for the Fall 2015 semester at the University of Hawai‘i Leeward Community College-Waia‘anae Campus. Plans and intentions of meeting a common goal for the betterment of a community and for social change always have a way of altering it’s course. I had to abort the mission, that I feel so passionately about, for a greater cause.

Over the past two and a half weeks, I have learned more about the struggle to protect Mauna Kea and all that it stands for than I have learned in the entire seven years plus that a handful of fierce and committed “guardians” of Mauna a Wakea have fought to defend Hawai‘i’s most sacred Mauna in all of its splendor, beauty, and glory. I strongly believe that the University of Hawai‘i and its Board of Regents did not wholeheartedly have the people of Hawai‘i’s best interest in mind when it came to the decision making, planning, and events of constructing an 18 story “Aloha Stadium” on a sacred mountain not intended for development. I am also convinced that it was not this University’s or this Board’s objective to fully inform the general public of the full terms and conditions, as well as the true adverse and detrimental effects that this TMT project will have on the natural, cultural, and historical landscape of a vastly revered site held at the utmost regard for it’s sacredness and spirituality. It is also my unanimous conclusion that it was this University and its Board Members’ plan of attack to release information in a forum not easily accessible or not freely available to the wide-ranging population of Hawai‘i and all of the world, for that matter, in a malicious attempt to conceal the decisions, events, and ongoing occurrences in reference to TMT construction on Mauna Kea.

The youth of today have taken to Social Media to fuel the fight for Protecting Mauna a Wakea, and it has taken the world by storm accessible to the most far-reaching places, such as Kenya. Social Media is capable of introducing substantial and pervasive information in a quality, immediate, permanent, frequent, and high speed way. For this reason, I base my argument that the University Hawai‘i and it’s Board, did not have intentions of publicly releasing information of the harsh reality and adverse impacts the TMT atop Mauna Kea would have. I could have sat here and stated the obvious arguments and the detrimental effects that the TMT project will have on the cultural heritage and spiritual connection, environment and natural beauty, and political and legal implications. That of which connects us to other cultures and their sacred mountains, the fragileness of ecosystems, natural resources, and endangered species, and the state’s contract with TMT should be null and void given that the Hawaiian Kingdom is illegally occupied by the United States. I will approach my extreme opposition to the TMT project solely on the basis of ethical values and moral code.

This struggle is not exclusively a fight of race, nation, culture, spirituality, religion, politics or legal issues. It is about integrity. My questions to the Board of Regents are: in your honest opinions, did each board member bring to the table good or bad consequences during the decision making and the planning phases of this wrongful project? Were the members of the Board able to leave the table with a clear conscience or were your integrities questioned? Did the board feel secure that the right decision was made or was there an uncertainty of the risks involved? Was this board committed to doing the right thing or were they untrue to their character? Finally, was the motives and intentions of
this board sincere or was there a hidden agenda, concealed by ultimately choosing NOT to inform the people of Hawai‘i and the world of the facts, information, effects, etc, whether valid or bias of the construction of TMT atop Mauna Kea by failing to utilize the most efficient and effective means of sending information and passing on education to reach the masses instantaneously. Scandal, cover-up, and smoke-screen come to mind at the immediate thought of the unethical happenings at the hand of the State of Hawai‘i’s public university board. I have lost all honor, respect, and integrity, and the open lines of communication and trust have been broken.

Social Media is a relatable and user friendly tool to deliver information to the present day generation and the future leaders of tomorrow faster than a blink of the eye. The public was not made aware of UH administrative and financial decisions and events surrounding the construction of TMT high atop Mauna a Wakea. The voices of the people of Hawai‘i were not seriously considered in the decision making process. I am confident that the people share my view when I say that I have lost all confidence in the ability of the University of Hawai‘i and the Board of Regents to lead this University with integrity and righteousness. Repairing damages done as a direct effect of BOR neglecting to inform the very people whose sacred places, cultural identity, and value system are at stake of being endangered and will take regaining the trust, integrity, respect, security, and balance of the people for whom this Institution of higher learning was built on.

Shannon Denning, BA

University of Hawai‘i-West O‘ahu, 2007

Committed to Native Hawaiian Issues Past, Present, and Future