Aloha: My name is Walter Meheula Heen. In the year 2000, I was appointed by UH Hilo Chancellor, Rose Tseng, to be the Interim Director of the newly formed Office of Mauna Kea Management. In that capacity, I oversaw the beginnings of the wresting of control over activities on Mauna Kea from the grips of the University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy. The office was formed in response to Native Hawaiian concerns over the activities on the “sacred mountain which were believed by many Hawaiians as disdainful of their veneration of the sacred mauna. Since then, I have maintained close contact with OMKM and UH Hilo. My purpose in accepting the appointment was twofold: first, I wanted to be satisfied that Mauna Kea’s sacredness was being properly respected, and that OMKM was maintaining proper oversight of all operations and activities on the mountain. As a member of the Board of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs I supported the placement and construction of the thirty meter telescope on Mauna Kea and served as a member of an advisory committee on the matter appointed by then University of Hawaii President Marcia Greenwood.

Native Hawaiian concern for the sacred mountain is everlasting and deep. However, the depth of that concern varies from one individual to another. To those at the center of the current controversy the concerns are soulful and deep. Other Native Hawaiians, however, hold that the veneration for the mountain should not be used as an excuse to forestall or prevent projects clearly and widely beneficial not only to Native Hawaiians but to the entire Hawaiian economy. It is my heartfelt view that the TMT is a project that is not only good for the economy of Hawaii, but can be of profound benefit to Native Hawaiians, particularly In the Hilo/Keaukaha area. As a member of the advisory committee to President Greenwood I insisted that the astronomy precinct install educational programs that would target the children of Keaukaha—and any other Hawaiian neighborhoods—and instill in them an awareness of their ancestors’ knowledge of the stars and celestial navigation and how that knowledge comports with astronomy studies. It is my hope that such programs will produce Native Hawaiian astronomers proudly combining that ancient knowledge with modern science.

I urge your honorable body to support the TMT project and also provide oversight of the University’s astronomy program so that it truly combines the ancient Hawaiian knowledge with modern astronomy.

By the way, I am 5/8ths Hawaiian, which is probably more than many of the protesters.