I am Joy Yoshina, a University of Hawaii employee. The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect those of my employer.

The debate about the Thirty Meter Telescope has become confused as the tipping point for Hawaiian sovereignty. Local, national and social media have been flooded with impassioned cries, oli and selfies by protestors who invoke Queen Liliuokalani as their reason for fighting the telescope, which now symbolizes the United States' overthrow, illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and subjugation of its people by Western ideology. Those against TMT refuse to accept any further incursion into their cultural legacies and wahi pana. Policy-makers are now voicing support for them, a move that may deflect many other public projects and initiatives. But TMT is no socio-political weapon. It is a vehicle of scientific inquiry, technology and unimaginable opportunity for the world's benefit, as well as a catalyst for local jobs. The decision on whether to continue TMT is overwhelmingly simple: IMUA!

While the movement for Hawaiian sovereignty points the Kū tiki at TMT, we must make the distinction that TMT has no bearing on achieving Hawaiian sovereignty. The effort to re-establish the Hawaiian Kingdom cannot be settled by the University of Hawaii Board of Regents, and legal questions undergoing court scrutiny should be settled in court. Instead, what we can address with TMT and OHA is the possibility of establishing fair and reasonable sublease rents.

Protestors' claims of illegal decision-making, ecological destruction and cultural desecration have been rampant but unsubstantiated. Aside from the years invested in public engagement for the TMT project, those familiar with management of Maunakea will know of, and may have contributed to, the Office of Maunakea Management's (OMKM) planning documents. These, too, were generated openly, and which identify and document the mountain's many resources, risks to the resources, and efforts to mitigate those risks. These are very real actions undertaken every day. Hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of extensive ground surveys have been conducted to identify, quantify and monitor the archaeological, cultural, historical, geological, and ecological resources. Management plans have established clear objectives and methods, and hinge on adaptive management to best protect the resources.

For a real example of ecological and cultural ruin, look at South Point. There, private “shuttles” are blatant commercial bedlam scarring the earth, ripping through heiau and other significant
archaeological sites, and exposing iwi. While this represents livelihoods for many area descendants, how can it be allowed to continue unchecked? As for claims of cultural desecration of Maunakea, we know Kamehameha I cannibalized the older, Mailekini heiau to build a fort (http://www.nps.gov/puhe/learn/historyculture/mailekini.htm). He may have also appropriated material from Mailekini toward his Pu‘ukoholā heiau, dedicated to war god, Kū, during the massive battles over Hawaii island in the late 1700s.

Those who reject TMT utterly ignore its economic benefits. As we are all aware, about 300 people will be needed for telescope construction. At the next stage, during actual observatory operations, another 140 or so people will be needed on a more-permanent basis. This places TMT at the same caliber as Hawaii Police, Fire and Public Works Departments; several of the Kona resorts; and Hilo and Waiakea high schools, in terms of employer size (https://www.hiwi.org/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/Largest_Employers-HawCty.pdf). Further, TMT has vowed to hire locally as much as possible. It is estimated that astronomy's impact to our island exceeded $91 million in 2012 (University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization, "The Economic Impact of Astronomy in Hawai‘i," 8/28/2014). Hawaii County recognizes a kind of trifecta between astronomy, Volcanoes National Park and the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority of locally-based entities contributing to global-level research (pg.3; http://gfoa.net/cagr/COA2011/HawaiiCountyHI.pdf).

Astronomy is as vital to us now as it was to the ancient Hawaiians. We cannot afford to give up the path to advance knowledge, develop new technologies, or boost employment for our island families. Let us work together to show development that will honor the Hawaiians' age-old innovation and wisdom, and to perpetuate their true tradition of exploration.

Sincerely,
Joy Yoshina