April 24, 2015

TO: University of Hawaii, Board of Regents

RE: In support of the TMT observatory on Mauna Kea

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am affiliate faculty at the University of Hawaii at Hilo for the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Management. I also serve as adjunct faculty at the College of Business and Economics. As non-tenured faculty, I am not restricted from sharing my personal views on the move to shut down the construction of TMT on Mauna Kea, although many of my colleagues and community acquaintances appear afraid to speak out on this issue. I have noted this to be the case throughout the community where many people are remaining quiet on the issue for fear of offending someone they know, yet they actually support the construction of TMT. This is often the case with issues of cultural sensitivity in our small community where persons who are not of Hawaiian descent, yet who are kama`aina, keep their voices silent for fear of being targeted as a haole. While I’ve respected the UHH Chancellor’s email explaining that instructional faculty should be considerate of students missing classes to attend anti-TMT protests, I’ve also noted that by and large the students in the five courses I’m currently teaching, who appear to be taking advantage of this consideration, are those who cannot afford to miss class!

As of this morning, nearly 5,800 people had signed a petition started last week by an 18 year old senior at HPA in Waimea, who is of Hawaiian ancestry, and was hopeful that she could study and pursue astronomy as her chosen field of interest here on the Big Island. While the anti-TMT petition presented to the governor this week had nearly ten times the number of signatures, the pro-TMT petition has been circulated for less than two weeks while the other has been out for signature for a considerably longer period of time.

If you didn’t read the following Letter to the Editor that appeared in the Hawaii Tribune Herald on April 22, 2015, I’ve reprinted it below as it speaks to the heart of the issue.

“What is sacred? Reading the pro- and anti-TMT debate, I think the word “sacred” should be removed from the discussion. If Mauna Kea is sacred, then all lands everywhere are sacred. If you have gold bracelets or earrings on your body, go look at the damage caused by hydraulic gold mining, when entire “sacred” mountains are erased so you can have those bracelets. When you drive a steel car or boat, first look up strip-mining, where “sacred” land is erased so you can drive your car and truck to the beach, to hunt, to fish, to party. And put gas in that car, which comes from drilling on “sacred” land to pump oil to be refined at a refinery built on “sacred” land. And buy products at the store, brought here on steel ships made from strip-mining on “sacred” land to meet your needs. May God’s blessings be to all of you, regardless of where you sit on the TMT.

Kim Magnuson Papaikou”
Building and operating telescopes on Mauna Kea, one of the best astronomy viewing sites on planet Earth, has produced many significant scientific discoveries, and brought economic benefit to the island, State and to the world’s advancement of astronomy. Hosting these observatories on a mountain sacred to the Hawaiians seems fitting as the Hawaiian culture previously placed high regard for understanding the universe and man’s place within the great scheme of things. How is building TMT a desecration? It isn’t like strip mining. It isn’t like mining for gold or diamonds which many of the Hawaiian culture wear willingly without considering the desecration of lands required to supply them with those ornaments.

All land is sacred to someone and should be managed sustainably. The observatories haven’t desecrated the mountain. They add to its value not only as a cultural icon, but as a leading site of astronomy worldwide. TMT is beholden to provide $1M/year to this island community which is very much needed. The economic multiplying effect of the money expended by the observatories and their staff currently housed on Mauna Kea provides benefit to everyone on this island. Taking that away and turning our backs on one of the greatest branches of science in the modern world, astronomy, which is the reason that the Polynesian people who arrived here around 200 to 300AD were able to travel here from the South Pacific, would be a travesty not only to the Hawaiian culture, but to the advancement of the human race.

Do we really believe that God, Gods, or whatever Higher Power one chooses to believe in, created the Sandwich Islands, now known as the Hawaiian Islands, for a certain group of the Polynesian culture to claim as their own upon discovering these islands in 200-300 AD? It is quite possible that early Polynesians drove off, or assimilated, human populations that were already resident on the islands when they landed. We don’t know for certain, nor do we know whether the race we now refer to as “Hawaiian” desecrated lands sacred to humans who may have preceded them as stewards of these islands. We are a global society in the 21st century, please let’s act like one and not make short sighted decisions based on a disrespect for other cultures. Proper stewardship is key, and this can be accomplished in a manner that honors all cultures.

Mahalo for your consideration,

M. Eileen O’Hara

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