

December 7, 2006

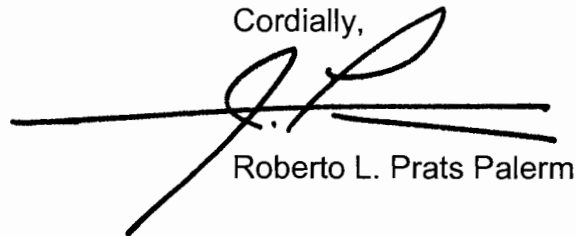
Mr. José Cordero
Arecibo Observatory
HC03 Box 53995
Arecibo, PR 00612

Dear Mr. Cordero:

Please find enclosed a copy of the letter that was sent yesterday by the Governor of Puerto Rico to the Director of the National Science Foundation ("NSF") opposing reductions in the funding by the NSF to the Arecibo Observatory.

I hope you will find this letter useful and should you need further assistance with the Government of Puerto Rico, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Cordially,



Roberto L. Prats Palerm

/mec

Enclosure



COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO

ANIBAL ACEVEDO VILÀ
GOVERNOR

December 5, 2006

Dr. Arden L. Bement, Jr.
Director
The National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

Dear Director Bement:

Recently, I became aware of the report issued by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Astronomic Sciences Senior Review, "From the Ground Up: Balancing the NSF Astronomy Program". I write to you with regards to the recommendations for the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center (NAIC), the primary research instrument of which is the Arecibo Observatory. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico strongly values the Arecibo Observatory, and I am concerned about the prospects of reduced, or terminated, federal funding for this facility.

The Arecibo Observatory, having existed in Puerto Rico for over 40 years, has become integrated into our local heritage, and provides myriad benefits for our society. With each ground-breaking achievement that originates from the Observatory, from the first discovery of planets outside our solar system, to the identification of new pulsars and other galactic objects, Puerto Rico shares in the sense of accomplishment. Beyond the pride of having such a preeminent center of science and exploration located on our Island, the Observatory is important to the educational, scientific and economic well-being of Puerto Rico.

As you may know, one of my Administration's primary objectives is the development of a science and technology based knowledge economy as the future engine of Puerto Rico. Essential to this is the fostering locally of educational appreciation and pursuit of math, sciences and engineering. Each year, thousands of Puerto Rican school children visit the Arecibo Observatory, where they learn about the remarkable scientific opportunities that exist. I know that many children take from these visits new dreams of being scientists, researchers and astronauts. The value of these visits in encouraging the creativity and imagination of our next generation is immeasurable, both to them as individuals, and to Puerto Rico's future.

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Certainly, this is consistent with many of the goals and aims of the NSF as well. I am aware that NSF grants are currently supporting the training of Puerto Rican teachers in math and science education at the University of Puerto Rico, and that the citizen science 'hands on' program at the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust's Hacienda La Esperanza Nature Reserve in Manatí also receives NSF funding. Furthermore, the opportunity for University of Puerto Rico undergraduate and graduate students to study and participate in research at the Arecibo Observatory helps them make their aspirations of careers in science a reality. By encouraging youth interest in science and engineering, fostering more mature educational development in these fields, and employing hundreds of local technicians and scientists, NSF, through its support of the Arecibo Observatory, is also advancing the goals of a diverse workforce by supporting the Hispanic community in the sciences.

Beyond Puerto Rico, the United States, and the global community, derive great benefits from the Arecibo Observatory. Scientific and astronomical breakthroughs achieved here, such as the correct determination of Mercury's rotation, or the exploration of deep space for new astronomical forces or objects, further the collective understanding of our solar system and space. The identification of near-Earth asteroid trajectories will aid in developing plans to protect our planet from possibly disastrous collisions. The possibility existent in the research at the Arecibo Observatory that we may learn of other intelligent life in the universe cannot but stimulate the imagination and wonderment of all.

In addition, well over a hundred thousand Puerto Ricans and tourists visit the Arecibo Observatory annually. This visitation brings important economic opportunity to the surrounding community of Arecibo and other surrounding municipalities, and it also permits the self-sustainment of the visitor center at the Observatory. Similarly, the appearance of the Observatory in notable films helps promote Puerto Rico, and brings additional jobs and investment to the Island.

While it is reasonable for the NSF to conduct periodic reviews of its programs and budgets, particularly as it charts its future investment in new and emerging sciences, the funding recommendations contained in the Senior Review are of great concern. Though the report suggests curtailing NSF Astronomical Sciences funding immediately, and possibly terminating beginning in Fiscal Year 2011, I understand from Cornell University scholars, and from the senior review report itself, that pioneering research can continue at the Arecibo Observatory for decades to come.

I am aware that the leadership of the National Science Foundation is currently analyzing the Senior Review report, and determining what action it should take on it. As you continue this process, I hope that you will take into consideration the many values that the Arecibo Observatory provides to the people of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

National Science Foundation
Arecibo Observatory
Page 3

It is my hope that the recommendations contained in the report suggesting funding reductions or termination for the Arecibo Observatory will not be adopted by National Science Foundation. My Administration stands ready to coordinate with the NSF in any way to maintain the federal funding necessary to remain in full operation. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or my office in Washington, D.C., to discuss this matter further.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter, and I look forward to working with you in support of continued scientific discovery at the Arecibo Observatory.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anibal Acevedo Vila', written over a horizontal line.

CC: Dr. G. Wayne Van Citters, Director
NSF Astronomical Sciences Division