Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 18, 2012

The Honorable Subra Suresh
Director
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

Dear Director Suresh:

We write to share with you our deep concerns about the Astronomy Portfolio Review (APR) Committee's recent recommendation that the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Astronomy Division divest itself from the Green Bank Observatory over the next five years. As you are no doubt aware, the state-of the-art Green Bank Observatory has contributed greatly to West Virginia's scientific, education, and economic well being for over half a century.

Your staff has updated our offices and we are encouraged to know that NSF does not plan to make a decision based on the APR recommendations until the end of 2013, and that NSF is under no legal authority to abide by the APR recommendations. It is reassuring to know that NSF officials will use the next sixteen months to carefully assess the opportunities, challenges, and alternate options for each facility that has been recommended for divestment.

Your staff also pledged NSF's desire to work with us in identifying positive solutions. We welcome that opportunity and seek your cooperation on a number of fronts. We would first appreciate from NSF a detailed timeline of the decision-making process through 2013, with each milestone event included, and assurances that Congressional notification will be part of that process. Further, in regard to exploring potential public-private partnerships to maintain the Green Bank Observatory, we would like to have a clear understanding of the specific legal authorities that NSF has to transfer the Observatory to another federal agency, university, or private entity. We would also seek a better understanding of the agency's plans to help transition each and every Green Bank employee under a potential divestment scenario, especially considering that nearly all federal and public/private entities are facing similar budgetary hardships. Finally, we implore NSF to exhaustively consider other options not included in the APR's recommendations.

In the face of this disappointing recommendation from the APR Committee, we will be vigilant in seeking a solution that will ensure Green Bank Observatory's continued operation well into the future. Our State takes enormous pride in the awe-inspiring scientific research performed at the observatory and especially in the public servants employed there -- each of whom have brought great distinction to the NSF mission. The Observatory's Science Education Center draws countless young students from West Virginia and throughout the nation to the

power and purpose of science – piquing curiosity in science and capturing that interest to help create the next generation of scientists. The Observatory is also an important economic engine for the region -- from the annual salaries and investments of $6.5 million, to the $7.5 million that 50,000 Green Bank visitors spend annually on transportation, food, lodging, and recreation in the area. In short, for an EPSCoR state like West Virginia, protecting quality science jobs and maintaining the operations of the largest scientific asset in the state will be a priority of the highest magnitude.

We look forward to working with you and your staff on options that will mutually benefit NSF and West Virginia, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person in the near future.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller IV

Nick J. Rahall II

Joe Manchin III