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Dear George,

I think that the idea of a 300-foot replacement is exciting. However, I also think that the astronomical community needs to be convinced--even if, as I presume, the money is "pork barrel" and won't come out of anybody's scientific hide. I would prefer to see a document that presents the scientific rationale in the broadest possible perspective so that any physical scientist, in any field but especially an astronomer working primarily in theory or observational areas other than radio astronomy, can appreciate the significant contributions such a telescope can make to the broad field of astronomy.

I had a conversation with Jay Lockman tonight and he gave me the list of the people you have invited to the Green Bank meeting. This list consists entirely of radio astronomers. What will surely come out of such a group is a document emphasizing the interests of the group, which will be oriented specifically toward radio astronomy issues. This will be a balanced document as I described above.

Production of a balanced document requires the participation of a broader segment of the community. For example, you have many pulsar observers but no pulsar theorists or X-ray binary types. You have many VLBI observers, but no optical astronomers who work on quasars or theorists. You have molecular line observers, extragalactic redshift machine builders, but no corresponding optical or theoretical types. You have no gamma ray types, who are interested in overall aspects of pulsars and their relation to what they see with their expensive satellite projects.

In short, you've invited just about every eminent radio astronomer, thus ensuring your broad-based support in radio astronomy (which I'm sure you'd have gotten anyway), but nobody else, thus taking the very risky chance that you won't extend the support beyond the radio community.

I believe that the other segments of the community must be involved from the very beginning. Otherwise, these segments will hear about this proposal by the grapevine. They will wonder where the money is coming from, they will complain that yet another major radio initiative is being launched, they will wonder why the expenditure of large amounts of money is being envisioned on what is, I suspect, perceived now as old-fashioned observational tools and techniques.

They will see the radio astronomers as performing an end run around traditional funding methods without consulting their colleagues who specialize in other subdisciplines.

Even if the money is truly "additional", we need the support of the entire community. Otherwise we run two risks: one, we won't have the broad-based support for this particular project, and without it we run the risk of not being successful; two, we run the risk of fragmenting the community, which makes more difficult the uniting of the entire community in support of future projects.

Yours, Carl Heiles