



*Advancing
Astronomy and
Geophysics*

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Professor Debra M. Elmegreen
President, American Astronomical Society
2000 Florida Ave. N. W., Suite 400
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17th August 2011

Dear Debra

The Royal Astronomical Society is greatly concerned at the proposed cancellation of funding for the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).

As the successor to the extraordinarily successful Hubble Space Telescope, the JWST will also study the Universe from space. Once up and running it will seek to answer some of the most fundamental questions about the cosmos, from searching for light from the first stars that formed after the Big Bang to studying other planetary systems.

The construction of JWST involves astronomers and space scientists from universities and space agencies including NASA, the Canadian Space Agency and the European Space Agency. Scientific agencies in all the participating nations including the United Kingdom see it as an endeavour of the highest priority.

In the UK, scientists and engineers are working on the Mid InfraRed Instrument (MIRI) and the Near InfraRed Spectrograph (NIRSpec), both of which are now at an advanced stage. British companies such as EADS Astrium and Tekdata are some of the key industrial partners in the construction of JWST, an involvement which is mirrored in all the partner countries.

JWST very much depends on leadership in science and technology from the United States, without which it will simply not happen. It is set to build on the work of Hubble, is bound to make another series of major discoveries and as a consequence we believe will enjoy similar global public recognition.

Like Hubble, JWST is a project that will provoke and inspire young and old alike and will foster a dialogue between scientists and the wider public. Exciting projects of this kind are an essential supplement to scientific education in schools and help to recruit young people to further study and to careers in science and engineering, a key goal of governments around the world.

For all these reasons JWST is backed by scientists across the globe and if it is cancelled, its loss would be a serious setback for science as a whole. The RAS therefore strongly supports the effort to secure funding for this important international scientific project.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Roger Davies
President, Royal Astronomical Society