

To all NRAO/GBO employees:

Early in June Adam Cohen, Karen O'Neil and I sent a message to all employees expressing our personal views and institutional commitments towards addressing racial discrimination, equality and diversity in the workplace. AUI and the observatories have engaged with external initiatives like #ShutdownSTEM and BlackLivesMatter in recent months, and we have arranged speakers and internal meetings (e.g. EDG sessions) to facilitate staff discussion. Momentum is building across the nation to address the underlying causes of inequality and racism, and our efforts are part of the changes underway.

I have received a lot of feedback in the past several weeks about all these efforts, generally very positive and supportive. However, there are also people at the Observatories who disagree with these recent initiatives, and reject the ongoing discussions. I respect that people have their own views on these issues, but our focus is on understanding the problems and improving the organization – AUI, NRAO and GBO have made the decision to support change. The key issues under consideration (systemic racism and inequality) are not political issues - but the negative feedback I receive tends to interpret them that way, and reactions can fall along political lines. This is a mistake. We are (unfortunately) living in a politically polarized time, where simple actions like wearing a mask during a pandemic can be interpreted as a political statement. Some staff members believe that efforts like BLM are politically motivated or have more complex agendas, and therefore they cannot and will not support them. I strongly disagree with these views, and I believe this type of thinking has no role in redefining our workplace. Focusing on doubts about the messenger, instead of considering the critical message and seeking changes, leads nowhere.

AUI, NRAO and GBO value diversity, equity and inclusion, and we understand the strength and value that they bring to R&D. Ending racial inequities must be an integral part of our mission and our daily work. To be successful in the long run it is important we acknowledge soon that despite many good intentions and a growing sense of purpose, we currently lack diversity in many areas, and we are not unified as a staff on these issues. We're at the beginning of the beginning... we have a lot of work to do.

Tony Beasley