

Hawaii governor: Telescope can continue, but changes needed

May 27 2015, by Jennifer Sinco Kelleher



Hawaii Gov. David Ige speaks to members of the media in Honolulu on Tuesday, May 26, 2015, about the project to build a giant telescope on Mauna Kea. The project to build a giant telescope near the summit of Mauna Kea has the right to move forward, but Hawaii has failed the mountain in many ways, Ige said Tuesday. (AP Photo/Jennifer Sinco Kelleher)

A project to build a giant telescope near the summit of Mauna Kea has the right to move forward, but Hawaii has failed the mountain in many

ways, Gov. David Ige said Tuesday.

Amid protests and arrests of opponents blocking construction workers from accessing the site, construction has been halted since last month on the \$1.4 billion Thirty Meter Telescope. Ige said it's up to the nonprofit telescope company to determine when construction will resume. "And we will support and enforce their right to do so," he said.

Kealoha Pisciotto, a longtime Big Island critic of the Thirty Meter Telescope, said she's disappointed in Ige's comments, which she said lacked substance. "It created this illusion that we're going to do something without really doing much," she said, adding that his words will not prompt protesters to leave the mountain.

"He affirmed that they will move forward," she said of telescope construction. "The deep sadness I feel is that means our people will be arrested."

Telescope officials didn't say when construction will resume.

"We appreciate that there are still people who are opposed to the project, and we will continue to respectfully listen and work with them to seek solutions," Henry Yang, chair of the TMT International Observatory Board, said in a statement.

Ige also vowed that there will be major changes in stewardship of Mauna Kea, held sacred by Native Hawaiians. The University of Hawaii, which leases the land, must do a better job in its stewardship, he said, listing 10 actions he's asking the university to take.

They include beginning to decommission as many as possible of the telescopes already on the mountain, with at least 25 percent of the 13 telescopes gone by the time Thirty Meter Telescope is ready for

operation; legally commit that this is the last area on the mountain where a telescope will be considered; restart the environmental review process for the university's lease extension; and significantly limit noncultural access to the mountain.

"We agree the university can and must do better and apologize for where our efforts have fallen short," university President David Lassner said, reading a prepared statement to media.

The university will issue a more comprehensive statement this week describing what steps it plans to take in response to the governor's list, Lassner said. What's being requested is reasonable, he said.

Ige also announced creating a Mauna Kea cultural council that will work with the state Department of Land and Natural Resources. He also wants telescope leaders to increase support for Native Hawaiian students studying science and technology.

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