

**NEWS FROM U.S. SENATOR TOM UDALL  
U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH  
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE STEVE PEARCE**

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**Udall, Heinrich, Pearce Announce \$1.2 Million to Upgrade  
Dunn Solar Telescope in Sunspot, NM, Transition Operation  
to NMSU Consortium**

**WASHINGTON - U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and U.S. Representative Steve Pearce** announced that New Mexico State University (NMSU) will receive \$1.2 million from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to upgrade the Richard B. Dunn Solar Telescope in Sunspot, N.M. The NSF award — appropriately announced on the fall equinox — will support efforts to transition the operation of the research facility from the National Solar Observatory (NSO) to a university-based consortium led by NMSU.

Located in the Sacramento Mountains, the Dunn Solar Telescope specializes in high resolution imaging and spectroscopy that allows astronomers worldwide to obtain a better understanding of the sun and how space weather impacts Earth. Equipped with advanced adaptive optics that compensate for blurring by the Earth's atmosphere, DST today provides higher resolution imaging than when it was first built in 1969. The DST also provides a versatile testbed for developing cutting-edge technologies for new telescopes. The nearby Sunspot Visitor Center and Museum provides visitors information about solar astronomy and the telescopes located at the site.

The National Solar Observatory, which currently operates DST, expects to open a new telescope by 2018 in Hawaii. This move presents an opportunity to transition the DST facility in Sunspot to a new operator. In an April 20, 2016, letter to NSF Director France Córdova, Udall, Heinrich, and Pearce urged NSF to work with potential partners to develop a plan for keeping the DST open and available for solar astronomers.

The NSF award announced today will support science and operations of the DST for a two-year period bridging the gap between the departure of the NSO at the end of 2017 and the development of the NMSU-led Sunspot Solar Observatory Consortium (SSOC) as the primary solar telescope operator beyond 2018. NMSU already operates several telescopes at the adjacent Apache Point Observatory in Sunspot. Funding from NSF will also allow NMSU to update and upgrade the solar telescope.

"This NSF funding will help upgrade the Dunn Solar Telescope and transform it into an incredible tool for new research by the NMSU-led consortium. Ultimately, NMSU and other researchers will be able to use this cutting-edge telescope to advance our understanding of the impact of the sun on our solar system," **Udall said.** "New Mexico has a proud tradition of solar astronomy stretching from some of our state's earliest inhabitants at Chaco Canyon to pioneering research in the 20th century

that took place at Sunspot. As a member of the Senate Commerce Committee, I'm pleased to support the important work of the Dunn Solar Telescope and NMSU."

"The Dunn Solar Telescope has provided scientists with a greater understanding of the sun since it first opened," **Heinrich said.** "I applaud the National Science Foundation and New Mexico State University for looking at ways to reinvent and reinvest in this national asset so it can become the premier training site for the next generation of solar scientists. This investment will help NMSU as it works to take over operations of the telescope. I will continue to work to find ways to support NMSU as it builds a coalition and creates a more permanent plan for the sustainability of the Sunspot facility. With the proper resources and long term vision, scientists should find great use in this facility, and New Mexico's space and science economy will continue to benefit from its presence for years to come."

"New Mexico is home to some of the nation and world's greatest scientific research facilities," **Pearce said.** "The opportunity to transfer one of these great assets to NMSU for continued use and research is phenomenal for STEM education in the State and for Solar research. This site will attract many aspiring astronomers to NMSU. I look forward to working with the delegation and NMSU to ensure this transition continues to progress smoothly and the Dunn Solar Telescope continues to be a key component in Solar research for years to come."

"We're excited that NSF have provided us with this opportunity to reinvent the Dunn Solar Telescope for new studies of the sun," **NMSU Chancellor Garrey Carruthers said.** "This funding makes it possible for us to work in Sunspot, N.M. alongside the National Solar Observatory, and retains the potential for continued valuable operations of the Dunn Solar Telescope and surrounding facilities. The next challenge for the research community is to develop a nationwide consortium of institutions that will take advantage of the unique capabilities of the telescope into the future. The Department of Astronomy at NMSU can now lead that effort. The Sunspot site also provides for jobs and public outreach in Otero County, and it is a science go-to tourist destination, bringing more money into the state of New Mexico. As such, NMSU have worked closely with Senators Udall and Heinrich, and Congressman Pearce on this effort and we thank them for their continuing interest and support of this project into the future."

NSF's Division of Astronomical Sciences is responsible for awarding this funding and also supports the work of the Very Large Array, one of the world's premier astronomical radio observatories located outside Socorro, N.M. NSF is an independent federal agency that supports research and education in all the non-medical fields of science and engineering. In 2015, NSF provided nearly \$10 million to NMSU researchers and a total of \$56.6 million in research funding across New Mexico.

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