President's Column – Debra Meloy Elmegreen –Nov.-Dec. 2010

As a beautiful Harvest Moon joins a brilliant Jupiter to illuminate our autumn skies and remind us why we're in this business, we've already enjoyed a half dozen AAS Decadal Survey Town Halls and about twice as many less formal Q&A sessions led by Astro2010 members around the country. We have a similar number yet to come this semester, culminating in Roger Blandford's wrap-up at the Seattle meeting Town Hall. I'm grateful to the host institution folks for their efforts in organizing the events locally, and to the Astro2010 members and AAS representatives for their presentations. Hopefully these discussions have elucidated the recommendations and helped clarify the process and constraints behind the very difficult decisions. For those who could not make it to a Town Hall, Space Telescope Science Institute/Johns Hopkins recorded theirs as a service to the community, and the webcast is available on the AAS and STScI websites.

It is important to bear in mind that the decadal recommendations were carefully built upon detailed science discussions, coupled with evaluations of the costs, technical risks, and readiness factors of possible activities with which to accomplish the goals, then crafted together within the confines of tightly constrained budget guidelines from the agencies. The recommended program is a coherent integrated plan of small, medium, and large activities. The ranked recommendations were not meant to be a smorgasbord from which to pick and choose at will, nor were particular activities meant to be partially implemented. The entire decadal process is at risk if the agencies or the community choose to modify or bypass the recommendations. While we anxiously await the new Congressional budget, many from the Astro2010 committee as well as the AAS Executive Office have had discussions with relevant Congressional and agency staff. We urge immediate implementation of the report's recommendation to form an independent standing committee, the Decadal Survey Implementation Advisory Committee (DSIAC), to be "constituted to monitor progress toward reaching the goals recommended in the decadal survey of astronomy and astrophysics, and to provide strategic advice to the agencies over the decade of implementation."

As discussions about the New Worlds, New Horizons report continue, several comments have struck me regarding issues that concern us all. I have heard from many graduate students who wonder whether their research in astronomy should now be restricted either to dark energy or exoplanets. Absolutely not! While Cosmic Dawn, New Worlds, and Fundamental Physics of the Universe were highlighted as three key areas ripe for discovery, they were not meant to exclude other astronomical endeavors. The report and the separate panel reports, all available as free downloads from the National Academies Press, detail a wealth of exciting astronomy investigations beckoning the next generation, and they include all areas, from the Sun to planets and stars to nearby and distant galaxies, to the universe as a whole, from the smallest particles to the largest structure, across the electromagnetic and gravitational spectrum, from lab measurements to theoretical calculations and simulations, to observations from ground and from space. Be sure to read Chapter 2 in the report as well as the science and program panel reports to see the key questions and discovery areas highlighted there for each subfield, as well as a detailed discussion on the research that lies immediately ahead. Many fields are

encompassed by the large projects. A key part of the WFIRST mission is the guest observer component using the wide field near-infrared imager; this general opportunity is one of the factors that led to WFIRST's number one ranking for large space missions. The LSST survey and the science opportunities with a GSMT also span many fields. While preparing for new large missions in the future, we have more immediate opportunities for innovations across several fields via the enhanced Explorer program, the Mid-scale Innovations Program, the proposed technology development, augmentations to existing programs, and new small initiatives, many of which relate to broad observing or theory areas; for example, the Theory and Computation Networks are designed to allow multi-year, multi-institutional efforts.

Graduate student concerns naturally are also focused on the job market. Advisors owe it to their students to heed the advice in Chapter 4 of the report about mentoring, such as discussing appropriate training and alternative career opportunities. The graduate student/postdoc career stage is a difficult one in which many young astronomers are also considering the ramifications of raising children while trying to achieve their professional goals, so the report reminds the community about the advantages of adopting family-friendly policies such as the Pasadena Recommendations (posted on the AAS website for handy reference). Students (and others!) should note that the AAS website has a number of helpful articles under the Career Resources and Employment websites about different types of jobs, preparation, and networking; furthermore, various AAS committees are working on ways to help us all. Additionally, the upcoming Seattle meeting presents some wonderful opportunities for professional development. Thanks to Kevin Marvel and Kellie Cruz for their successful NSF grant, and building on their initial efforts in DC, there will be workshops and seminars on Negotiation, Leadership, Making Good Plots, and Giving Effective Talks, plus a 1/2 day career workshop by Alaina Levine, "Advancing Your Career in Astronomy: Identifying and Seizing Opportunities, Learning and Honing Professional Skills."

While thinking about decadal goals, I'd like to point out that the AAS has society-wide goals as well. The AAS Strategic Plan, developed over the past year during John Huchra's presidency, is now available as a draft on the AAS website. It lists the priorities and goals for the Society for the next 5 years, building on our Mission Statement. Comments on the plan are welcome as we work towards achieving the goals. The AAS community may be interested to know that the Executive Committee of the AAS (consisting of the President, Past President or President-elect in alternate years, senior VPs, Treasurer, Secretary, and CEO) meets in October each year to discuss ongoing operations and new initiatives. This fall, we will hear reports from CEO Kevin Marvel about budget and operations, from Director of Publishing Chris Biemesderfer about the journals, from Press Officer and Education and Outreach Coordinator Rick Fienberg, and from the new Bahcall Public Policy Fellow Bethany Johns (we wish outgoing Fellow Anita Krishnamurthi well in her new position), and will also meet with Division Heads to hear about their activities. We will be considering further how the infrastructure advice in the decadal report can be incorporated within the bounds of the AAS goals. Besides the professional development at AAS meetings, the Demographics Committee has now been

formally constituted and is making plans for a new longitudinal study, and new outreach and mentoring efforts are being discussed.

As always, I welcome your comments and input, since the AAS is most relevant even between meetings if we are working towards goals that make sense to the membership. And I look forward to seeing a big crowd at the Seattle meeting in January!