

**Statement by Academy President Bruce Alberts
on the Resignation of Harold Varmus as
Director of the National Institutes of Health**

October 7, 1999

In 1993, I chaired a committee established by Donna Shalala, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to recommend candidates for the critical position of director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Although Harold Varmus had no prior administrative experience besides that of running a large and productive research laboratory, our committee felt that he had many talents that would make him a fine NIH director. At the time of his appointment, I released the following statement:

"I have known Harold Varmus as a colleague at the University of California at San Francisco for 17 years. He is a very effective, intelligent, and energetic person, who has been running a large research laboratory very effectively. As an expert on AIDS and on cancer, he is ideally positioned to maximize the effectiveness of future research in these two crucial areas. In addition, his deep understanding of modern biomedical research makes it possible for him to introduce innovative programs aimed at creating a stronger interface between modern cell biology and human disease research. In my personal view, the revolution in biology has created tremendous opportunities for important medical advances, and many of these would greatly benefit from programs designed to bring outstanding cell and molecular biologists into new research areas."

I think it is fair to say that during his six years in charge of the NIH, Harold has exceeded our high expectations for him. His effectiveness with Congress and the public is perhaps best exemplified by the remarkable increases that he has been able to obtain in biomedical research funding.

As his major legacy, Harold leaves a stellar group of newly appointed Institute directors. These individuals have been selected not only for their leadership and management abilities, but also as very energetic people who have the highest scientific standards. Their strong positive influence on U.S. biomedical science will be felt for many years to come.

There is a second legacy that is perhaps equally important. Through his actions, Harold has brought two very different worlds -- science and public policy -- much closer together. He leaves, in the power structures of Washington, a greatly increased respect for the values and culture of the entire scientific community.