

BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Varmus to Leave NIH in December To Run Sloan-Kettering ...

Last week, Harold Varmus made it official. After weeks of rumors (*Science*, 30 July, p. 649), Varmus informed President Clinton that he will resign as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) "at the end of the year" to succeed Paul Marks as president of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.

The long-anticipated announcement immediately touched off speculation about who will succeed Varmus at the top of the world's largest and best-known biomedical research institution. It may be hard to fill the post with an outsider just a year before a change of administration. And Varmus's departure rattled some NIH staffers involved in unfinished projects. As one said last week: "You understand why [Varmus is] going... but you can't help feeling, as the song says: 'You picked a fine time to leave me, Lucille.'"

Varmus will leave NIH in good shape.

Last year, Congress gave NIH the largest funding increase on record—\$2 billion—bringing its total budget to \$15.6 billion. Despite gridlock in Congress this fall, both Republicans and Democrats seem ready to repeat their generosity. The House appropriations committee recently approved a \$1.1 billion increase for NIH in 2000, and last week the full Senate approved a \$2 billion raise. This would put NIH's budget on the second year of a 5-year path toward doubling.

Varmus says he will "work intensively on NIH problems until the day I leave" in late December. After that, deputy director Ruth Kirschstein will "hold down the fort." Kirschstein is "diligent, loyal, [and] hard-working" and is "adored" by her peers, says

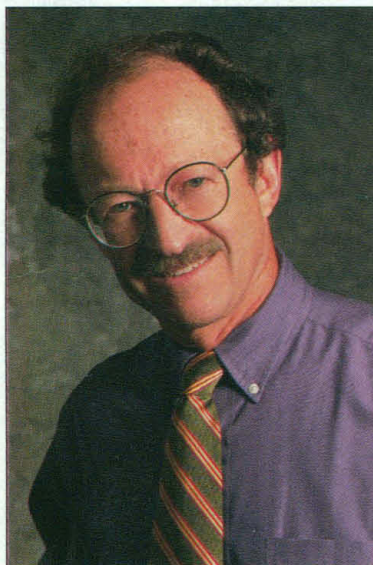
Elizabeth Marincola, executive director of the American Society for Cell Biology. Kirschstein has run NIH before: In 1993, she was acting chief while Varmus awaited approval. But it would add "credibility," Varmus says, to have "someone who has the documented support of a search committee ... and has been endorsed by the Senate."

Varmus is urging the president to appoint a new director quickly. In his 7 October letter to Clinton, he wrote, "I am conscious of the risks you assumed in 1993" by choosing a bench scientist to head NIH. But, Varmus added, "I hope that the achievements of the past several years will encourage you and your successors to consider other active medical scientists to run this extraordinary agency." He has been lobbying for a late-term appointment, he says, partly because it would "send a good signal about the bipartisan nature of the job."

Few seem to think that will happen, however. "I think it would be hard," says a House Democratic aide. "It's highly unlikely"

says a Senate Republican staffer. "A long shot," says a key House Republican aide, adding that he can't see someone of national stature "pulling up stakes and coming here for 18 months," which is how long the job might last if the next president decided to appoint someone new. But conventional wisdom has been wrong before, and Varmus insists there's "a reasonable prospect" of getting a permanent chief soon.

The Administration could speed up the process by recruiting from within NIH. Last week, speculation centered on National Cancer Institute director Richard Klausner, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Anthony Fauci, and National Institute of Mental Health director



Back to the Big Apple. Varmus is looking forward to being in "a great city."

Stephen Hyman. But no local recruitment effort seems to have begun—at least not yet.

The lame-duck status of the NIH director isn't likely to have a big impact either on NIH's budget prospects or on the outcome of the controversy over whether NIH should finance research on human embryonic stem cells, according to congressional aides. But it could slow some projects—like Varmus's plan for the online database called PubMed Central (*Science*, 3 September, p. 1466). Varmus himself insists that PubMed Central "won't need me" after January, "when we get started and people see how effective it is and how few side effects there are for existing journals."

Varmus, who will turn 60 next year, says he took the Sloan-Kettering job because "I wanted to be in a place where there was medicine and a prospect of seeing laboratory findings affect a patient. I wanted to be in a great city." Varmus also has a high regard for Marks, his former Columbia University professor, whose molecular medicine lectures were "pivotal ... in my intellectual growth" in the 1960s. (Marks will continue doing research at Sloan-Kettering.)

Varmus's compensation will be a little less than \$1 million a year, six times his NIH salary. But he took a pay cut to come to NIH and notes that "I haven't had a salary raise in 6 years." He and his wife, journalist Constance Casey, "like the idea of being back in the incredible cultural richness of New York." He will continue his work on mouse models of cancer in his lab and "possibly branch out" to new subjects. But there is one drawback, he concedes: Manhattan isn't ideal for one of his passions—bicycling. —ELIOT MARSHALL

FRANCE

... Kourilsky Takes Helm At the Pasteur Institute

PARIS—France's preeminent center for biomedical research, the Pasteur Institute in Paris, will start the next millennium with a new leader. Philippe Kourilsky, an internationally known immunologist at Pasteur, will replace outgoing director-general Maxime Schwartz on 1 January. Schwartz is stepping down after serving the maximum allowed tenure of two 6-year terms. The decision, which was made by the institute's 20-member executive board on 7 October, has been broadly welcomed by Pasteur scientists, who have been engaged in a long debate on the in-

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