

June 21, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair
Senate HELP Committee
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Sanders, and Ranking Member Cassidy,

We are writing as former Directors of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to offer our strong support for President Biden's nomination of Dr. Monica Bertagnolli, the current Director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), as the next NIH Director and to urge that she be rapidly confirmed by the US Senate.

The NIH is among the largest agencies in the US government, with a budget approaching 50 billion dollars, and it has been responsible for advances in science and medicine that have improved the health of our citizens and of people throughout the world. Yet the agency has been without a confirmed Director for a year and a half, constraining the agency's ability to make decisions in the ever-changing world of biomedical science.

At a time in which the Covid-19 pandemic is receding and new opportunities to combat disease are increasing, we believe that it is essential to place a strong leader officially in charge of the NIH as quickly as possible. We know from our own experiences in government that it is difficult for an agency, especially one as large and complex as the NIH, to make major decisions and to work effectively with other components of the Federal government and with the various organizations, at home and abroad, that are engaged with the health sciences.

We strongly believe Dr. Bertagnolli has the skills, experience, and vision required to lead this complex agency and maintain its reputation as the global leader. We know that serving as the NIH Director is a complex job with deep and varied responsibilities. We are convinced that Dr. Bertagnolli's experiences as a prominent NIH-supported investigator, as a practicing surgeon at Harvard Medical School's affiliated hospitals, as a leader in the conduct of national clinical trials, and as a breast cancer survivor place her in a unique position to lead the agency.

Indeed, Dr. Bertagnolli has already demonstrated her ability to serve as an exceptional leader of a major component of the NIH. During her relatively short tenure as NCI Director, she has played a critical role in relaunching the President's Cancer Moonshot Initiative, brought together partners and resources from different sectors to launch groundbreaking studies of cancer prevention and early detection, made more clinical trials available to more Americans, and won the respect of the public by her frank and educational portrayals of her experience dealing effectively with her own cancer diagnosis.

The nomination of Dr. Bertagnolli provides the nation with an opportunity to place a skilled, experienced, and dedicated person in charge of the NIH, after a year and a half without a confirmed leader. We urge you and your colleagues in the Senate to confirm the nomination of Dr. Bertagnolli as the next NIH Director with all deliberate speed.

We would be pleased to provide any additional information you might seek during the confirmation process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Harold Varmus".

Harold Varmus, MD
Lewis Thomas University Professor
Weill-Cornell Medicine
Former Director, NIH (1993-1999)
Former Director, NCI (2010-2015)

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elias Zerhouni".

Elias Zerhouni, MD
Professor Emeritus,
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
Former Director, NIH (2002-2008)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis Collins".

Francis Collins, MD, PhD
Former Director, NIH (2009-2021)