

Viewpoint: Why Francis Collins is a bad choice to head the NIH

[I]n his eight years in charge of federal efforts to understand, diagnose and cure disease, current NIH Director Francis Collins has systematically undermined the effectiveness of the institution and overseen a decline of American science.

Biomedical research in the US has been driven by the creativity and industry of individual investigators and their trainees. Collins has systematically diverted funds from investigator-initiated projects in favor of “big science” projects conceived in and managed from inside the Beltway.

The model for these initiatives is the well-regarded Human Genome Project. However Collins, who headed this project in its final years, learned all the wrong lessons from this effort, focusing on central planning and control, and the generation of massive datasets, while ignoring the importance of technology development. Hence his signature projects as NIH director have been ill-conceived and wasteful of precious research funds.

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The National Institutes of Health are an invaluable resource for the American people and our economy. But it is in serious need of reform if we are to benefit optimally from the opportunities of 21st century biomedicine. It’s time to replace Francis Collins and name a talented physician scientist with real vision and wisdom as NIH Director.

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