

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DR. MONICA BERTAGNOLLI
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
OCTOBER 18, 2023**

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It's an honor to appear before you to share my vision for the NIH.

I want to thank President Biden for trusting me with this nomination and Senator Barrasso for the kind introduction. I also want to thank my husband, Alex, and my two children for their unwavering support and unqualified love.

I grew up on a ranch in southwestern Wyoming. My early inspiration was my uncle, a primary care physician whose practice included traveling across the state to provide expert care to veterans – and it was his devotion to his patients that inspired me to pursue medicine. Like millions of Americans, when my father had cancer, the care he needed was hundreds of miles away, and prohibitively expensive, so I have seen firsthand what it means to deliver care to those living in rural communities.

I have spent my entire professional life working to improve cancer prevention and treatment. I have done this as a surgical oncologist, researcher, and as a professor of surgery helping train the next generation of doctors and scientists. As a physician-scientist, I have run major clinical trials, helped to advance innovative research, and pushed hospitals and institutions to make sure the most effective treatments were available to all patients.

And for the past year I have had the tremendous privilege of serving as the director of the National Cancer Institute and working towards the President's Cancer Moonshot goal to end cancer as we know it. My experience has given me new appreciation for the innerworkings of NIH, and what more is possible.

More recently though, I found myself in a different position: as a patient, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My prognosis is very favorable. I was fortunate to have my cancer detected early. I also had access to excellent care, knowing full well that not every patient has that same chance. Most importantly, every treatment I have received was supported by NIH-funded research. I am grateful beyond words to the patients who joined clinical trials before me and the doctors and researchers who were able to use that information to make the best decisions.

My fidelity to ensuring that high-quality, affordable care is available to everyone is informed by my own life experiences. If confirmed, I will work every day to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness for all Americans – and in so doing, fulfill the mission of the NIH.

There is so much that excites me about the possibility of leading the extraordinary team at NIH.

First, there has never been more potential for progress than we have today - we just need to harness it. NIH can and must support research that is equitable and accessible to all populations

regardless of income or zip code – that includes dramatically increasing clinical trials that reflect the diversity of Americans because we know that's what yields the best results. We should also improve the experience of people and communities whose health depends on the knowledge that cutting-edge research brings. We should capitalize on new innovations in uncovering fundamental biology, in health information technology, and in exciting new data analytics. And we must interrogate the broad range of behavioral and social science challenges we face today while laying the foundation to address new issues in the future.

Second, we have an unprecedented opportunity to embrace and increase access to innovation. As a physician-researcher for more than 30 years, I have seen the transformative power of research to produce results that save lives, but I've also seen the patients whose prospects were compromised by preventable factors. As we work to bring innovation to patients, we must ensure that we deploy NIH's research further, and wider, and that we deliver results that work for everyone. Throughout all this, we should be able to guarantee that the American people are getting a return on their investment by ensuring healthcare innovations are available and affordable for everyone.

Finally, we must restore faith and trust in our nation's top scientists. NIH is the steward of our nation's medical research, and I am committed to ensuring that NIH continues to be a force of innovation and discovery. To do that, we need to make science accessible to all communities and inspire young people to become doctors and scientists, to continue this critically important work for generations.

None of this NIH can do alone. I look forward to partnering with Congress, and many others, to bring research into to every community and apply the results to better the lives of every American.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

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