OPINION

Busy summer for the NIH

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Nearly five months into his term, on Wednesday President Obama finally **nominated a new director** of the **National Institutes of Health** (NIH): famed geneticist Francis Collins.

The announcement came the day after the NIH released new guidelines encouraging **research based on human embryonic stem cells**.

Both announcements are critically important, especially given our growing dependence on the government for research support. The NIH is one of the world's largest scientific funding agencies, and its director is responsible for managing 27 institutes, 18,000 employees and a $31 billion annual budget. The agency also oversees the 10-year, $800 million **'strategic plan' for autism research**.

Although some scientists have raised eyebrows at Collins' **outspoken evangelical Christian beliefs**, few doubt his research cred. Over the past two decades, his research team has discovered faulty genes in cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease, neurofibromatosis, type 2 diabetes and several other conditions.

From 1993 to 2008, as head of the **National Human Genome Research Institute**, he successfully led the government's effort to sequence the 6 billion letters of the human DNA code. (He reportedly

plays a guitar **inscribed with a DNA double helix**.)

Assuming the Senate confirms his appointment, Collins has his work cut out for him. NIH grant reviewers are drowning under the weight of 40,000 new applications for stimulus money (more than twice as many as last June), with 30,000 more expected to roll in this fall. Good luck, Director!