

## **Nominee's strong commitment to effective continuity of government**

Dr. Al Rabson, or "Al," as he prefers to be called, came to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1955, as a scientist in the National Cancer Institute (NCI), only 17 years old at the time. He quickly established a highly productive research laboratory, studying the role of viruses in cancer. He published an average of 7 papers per year in highly-respected, peer-reviewed journals, an extraordinary pace. In 1975, Al was named Director of the NCI's Division of Cancer Biology, and Diagnosis, later to become the Division of Cancer Biology, Diagnosis, and Centers (DCBDC). He served there for 20 years and then was appointed Deputy Director of the NCI, where he still serves. He has done a magnificent job of managing the science at the NCI. The two major factors behind his success have been his ability to recruit and tirelessly nurture exceptional scientists and his constant drive to improve the operation of their workplace environment. It is this legacy that will ensure the continuing excellence of the NCI.

Over the course of his administrative career, Al has identified, mentored, and fostered the research careers of many intramural NCI scientists who have brought great distinction to the institution. His strong commitment to research excellence, together with his enthusiasm, integrity, fairness, and accessibility created a unique spirit that has had a remarkable influence on the scientists that have come to the NCI. There is unanimity in their love for this man, and it derives from his philosophy toward them: He has never interfered with their research, and he has always nurtured the scientists to the fullest extent possible. Sometimes this has meant providing funding for an unusually expensive piece of equipment, or for additional personnel, or for conducting workshops overseas. Other times, he has created the laboratory space needed for research projects. At all times, he has been pleasant and helpful and enthusiastic toward everyone, whether scientist, patient, employee, or visitor. He is very much a man of the people. Though he maintains a busy schedule, if anyone calls him, they can have a face-to-face meeting within 2 hours, without exception. Al is known as the person who, rather than saying no, does everything he can to "make it happen." He is totally dedicated to the NCI's intramural research program, to the point that he gave up his own very successful lab to better focus on the needs of his researchers. This is the philosophy that he has instilled in NCI's scientists and in his employees.

It is a testament to Al's mentoring that many scientists from his DCBDC have gone on to major leadership positions at the NCI and elsewhere. Eight have been elected to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). Five have been elected to the NAS Institute of Medicine. The two previous and current NIH Deputy Directors of Intramural Research both came from DCBDC. At least two DCBDC investigators have become Directors of NIH Institutes (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases; National Institute on Aging). One became the Director of the Carnegie Institution. All of these scientists have in turn mentored others, one of whom (Harold Varmus) would later win the Nobel Prize.

In addition to Al's highly successful mentoring, he has been deeply involved in improving the operation of the NCI, in order to ensure its effective continuity.

To assure that high quality research continues to be conducted at NCI, Al has helped set goals in line with the NCI budget, and to create annual reports to track our progress in science, facilities and infrastructure planning, and budget management. This has been an especially challenging feat in light of recent budget cuts, but Al is the one entrusted to do it. In addition, he oversees the quadrennial evaluations by an independent outside panel, to help NCI assess the state of its science. These reviews also help with strategic planning and led, for instance, to the NCI-Frederick biological warfare facility being enlisted to help the nation prepare for and effectively respond to bioterrorism and other public disasters through its collaborations with the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases and with the Department of Defense.

Because all NCI employees are required to comport with Federal ethical standards, Al reviews ethics issues and creates, implements, and evaluates new NCI ethical policies. His oversight of the NCI Ethics Office ensures that all government ethics standards are carefully followed. For example, NCI participated in the NIH Ethics Advisory Committee's review of NIH policies on employee activities compensated by an outside source. Al oversaw the internal audit and the review of potential conflicts of interest, as well as the development, implementation, and compliance-tracking of ethics training customized to the needs of individual divisions or job specialties.

As part of the Institute's commitment to ongoing workforce development, Al approved the design and implementation of an administrative mentoring project called Knowledge Sharing: A Mentoring Program. In this, its initial year, the program sponsored 30 mentoring pairs at all levels across the Institute engaged in or interested in administrative fields. The program has been highly successful and continues today.

Al has also provided strong leadership in assessing management outcomes. For example, under his guidance, a major survey was conducted of the NCI work environment. He has worked with the NCI Director, Deputy Directors and Division leadership on action-planning around the issues resulting from the survey. Al has also overseen research to produce a Five-Year Strategic Human Capital Plan for the NCI, including workload indicators, model validation, and skills gap analysis.

By training future generations of high-caliber scientists, and by diligently striving always to improve the inner workings of the NCI, Al Rabson has clearly demonstrated his dedication to the NCI's continued excellence. As is mentioned in both of the narratives being submitted, he is that rare individual who has progressed from outstanding scientist to outstanding administrator, and the NCI has benefited greatly from amplifying Al's influence in this way.