

Bush Taps von Eschenbach, Outspoken Supporter of Genomics, to Head FDA

By a GenomeWeb News staff reporter

NEW YORK, March 16 (GenomeWeb News) - President Bush yesterday nominated Andrew von Eschenbach to head the US Food and Drug Administration, a potentially significant move for the genomics community because von Eschenbach has been an outspoken supporter of genomic-related technologies in drug discovery.

The nomination was widely expected because von Eschenbach, who is director of the National Cancer Institute, has been acting-FDA commissioner since Lester Crawford resigned in September 2005.

Von Eschenbach's background in cancer, along with recent statements he made, suggest that his tenure as FDA head may encourage the use of genomics and other molecular technologies in medicine.

For example, as head of the NCI since 2002, von Eschenbach pushed a program of translational research, and in recent comments before a Senate subcommittee hearing he announced a goal to eliminate cancer by 2015 through an understanding of the interaction of genetics and other factors.

"Scientific advances and major discoveries from areas such as genomics, nanotechnology, proteomics, immunology, and bioinformatics allow us to envision a not too-distant future when a patient's genetic, lifestyle, and environmental risk for cancer can be combined with effective prevention and early intervention strategies especially for those at high risk," von Eschenbach was quoted as saying by the Biotechnology Industry Organization in April 2005.

Von Eschenbach was named acting commissioner of the FDA in September 2005 following the resignation of Lester Crawford, and he has held that title concomitantly with his NCI job.

Prior to being named NCI chief, von Eschenbach worked as a doctor and executive at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for 25 years, reaching the post of executive vice president and chief academic officer.

He earned a medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine in 1967, and worked as an instructor in urology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. From 1968 to 1971, von Eschenbach served as a Lieutenant Commander in the US Navy Medical Corps.