NEW YORK (GenomeWeb) – Harold Varmus resigned as director of the National Cancer Institute today, effective at the end of March. He served as the institute’s director for almost five years.

In a personal letter to the NCI community, he said that he will miss his job at the institute but looks forward to new opportunities in "the city, New York, that I continue to call home."

Starting in April, Varmus plans to establish a "modestly sized" research laboratory at the Meyer Cancer Center at Weill-Cornell Medical College and to serve as a senior advisor to its dean.

In addition, he plans to assist the New York Genome Center "as it develop its research and service functions and helps regional institutions introduce genomics into cancer care."

In his letter, Varmus bemoaned the funding cuts the NCI has undergone in recent years. "While penury is never a good thing, I have sought its silver linings," he wrote, taking advice from British nuclear physicist Ernest Rutherford, who allegedly told his lab during a period of fiscal restraint that "…we’ve run out of money, it is time to start thinking."
Prior to joining the NCI as director in 2010, Varmus was president of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. From 1993 until 1999, he served as director of the National Institutes of Health under President Clinton.

Varmus received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1989 for the discovery of the cellular origin of retroviral oncogenes.