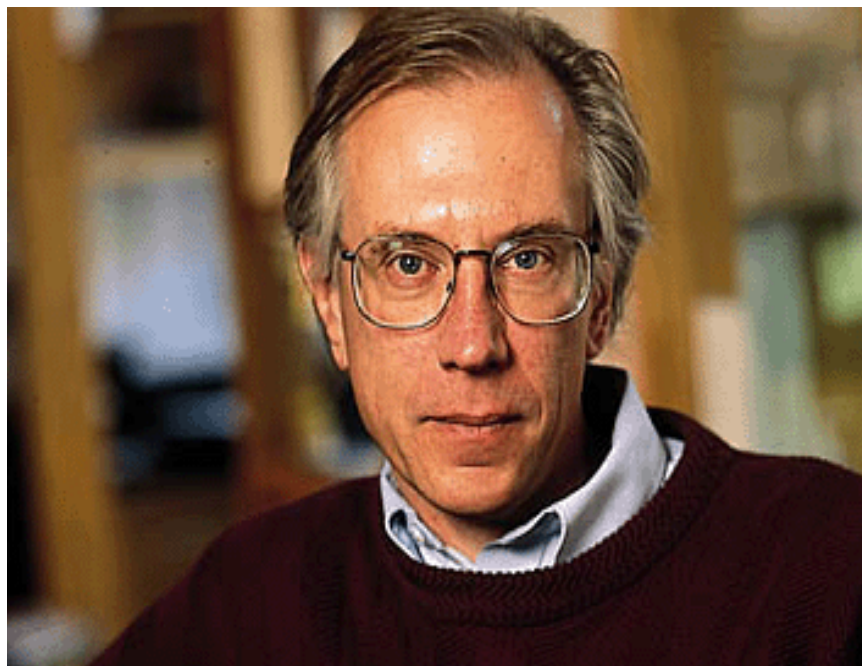


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## Thomas R. Cech to Become the Next President of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute



**Image Title:** Thomas R. Cech - Paul Feters

The Trustees of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute have selected Thomas R. Cech of the University of Colorado at Boulder to become the next president of the Institute.

Cech, who won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1989, will assume the presidency next January. He will succeed Purnell W. Choppin, president of the Institute since 1987, who announced late last year that he would retire at the end of 1999.

"The Trustees are delighted that Tom Cech has agreed to bring his creative leadership to the guidance of the Hughes Institute," said Hanna H. Gray, chairman of the HHMI Trustees and head of the committee that conducted

the presidential search.

"Professor Cech is a distinguished scientist of great accomplishment, with a profound understanding of the research world. As a Hughes investigator for more than 10 years, he knows the Institute extremely well and is in a unique position to lead it during this period of accelerating discovery in the biological sciences and in medicine.

"In addition, he is a wonderful teacher who has repeatedly carved out time to teach undergraduates at the University of Colorado. He will bring the same thoughtful dedication to the Hughes Institute's grants program, which focuses upon science education," she said.

Cech, who is 51, has been an HHMI investigator since 1988 and a member of the faculty at the University of Colorado in Boulder since 1978. He is also a professor of biochemistry, biophysics and genetics at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver. He attended Grinnell College as an undergraduate and earned his doctorate in chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied under John E. Hearst. As a postdoctoral fellow, he worked in the laboratory of Mary-Lou Pardue at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Cech's wife, Carol, is also a biochemist. They met at Grinnell and attended graduate school together at Berkeley, where she earned her doctorate; she did her postdoctoral work at Harvard University. The Cechs have two daughters.

Cech shared the Nobel Prize in chemistry with Sidney Altman of Yale University for work that each had done independently. In announcing the awards, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said that they had been selected "for their discovery that RNA (ribonucleic acid) in living cells is not only a molecule of heredity but also can function as a biocatalyst. This discovery, which came as a complete surprise to scientists, concerns fundamental aspects of the molecular basis of life. Many chapters in our textbooks have [had] to be revised."

Cech is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has received numerous prizes and awards, including the Pfizer Award in Enzyme Chemistry, the Award in Molecular Biology (National Academy of Sciences), the Heineken Prize (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), the Lasker Award and the National Medal of Science, which was presented to him by President Clinton at a White House ceremony in 1995. He has received honorary doctorates from Grinnell College and the University of Chicago.

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute is a scientific and philanthropic organization dedicated to the conduct of basic biomedical research. It operates through collaborative research agreements with U.S. universities and other research organizations. Under these agreements, the Institute's 318

investigators carry out their research programs in Institute laboratories located on the various campuses; all investigators are required to hold faculty appointments.

In addition, HHMI has a grants program that supports science education in the United States at every level, from elementary school through postdoctoral training. It also supports the work of selected biomedical scientists in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, South America, Mexico and Canada.

With an endowment currently valued at \$11.4 billion, the Institute is among the largest philanthropies in the world. Its operating budget this year is \$556 million, including \$424 million for its scientific program and \$99 million for grants. HHMI was established in 1953 by the aviator-industrialist Howard R. Hughes, Jr.