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HHMI Expands Scientific Leadership; Jack Dixon to Join Institute from UCSD

The Trustees of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute have elected Jack E. Dixon, now Dean of Scientific Affairs at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, as vice president and chief scientific officer. His appointment is effective February 1, 2007. At that time, David A. Clayton will become vice president for research operations.

HHMI investigators are among the most creative and successful biomedical scientists in the world. This expansion of the Institute's scientific leadership will enhance our ability to support their efforts and plan new research initiatives, said HHMI president Thomas R. Cech, in making the announcement.

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— **Jack E. Dixon**

Until recently, the Institute's investigator program has benefited from the leadership of both David Clayton and Gerry Rubin, explained Cech. Rubin's move to Virginia as director of HHMI's Janelia Farm Research Campus created an opportunity to add to our science leadership at our Maryland headquarters.

Dixon, currently a member of the Institute's Medical Advisory Board, will play major roles both in HHMI's flagship investigator program and in identifying new opportunities that capitalize on the Institute's expertise in biomedical research and science education.

Clayton, who joined HHMI from Stanford University in 1996, will be responsible for managing the Institute's research operations, including

budgets, salaries, and major equipment purchases. Clayton will continue to oversee the Institute's investments in research facilities, such as the synchrotron beamlines built by HHMI at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in Berkeley, California.

I have done discovery research for better than 30 years, said Dixon. The opportunity to work for an organization that can affect science and science education around the world is really appealing.

Dixon will continue to maintain a laboratory at UCSD, where he is also a professor of pharmacology, cellular and molecular medicine, chemistry, and biochemistry. I think you can be a better scientific leader if your feet are on the ground and you are dealing with the same things as the investigators, he said.

Dixon, a member of both the Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Sciences, has had a distinguished scientific career. Trained as a chemist, he received a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1971 and joined the biochemistry faculty at Purdue University in 1973. Dixon became chair of the department of biological chemistry at the University of Michigan in 1991 and held the Minor J. Coon Professorship. He became co-director of Michigan's Life Sciences Institute in 2001, but returned to California in 2003 to rejoin UCSD, where he had been a postdoctoral fellow, as dean of scientific affairs.

Dixon's research has focused on a group of proteins called protein tyrosine phosphatases that govern a key biochemical reaction in which a phosphate group is added to another protein. The reaction, called phosphorylation, serves as a signaling mechanism between living cells. The work has implications for understanding the uncontrolled growth that is characteristic of cancer, the routing of nerve fibers, and the success of disease-causing bacteria and viruses in overcoming the mammalian immune system.

Clayton is a molecular biologist who has made major contributions to the understanding of the role of mitochondrial genes and the many human diseases that occur following mutations of these genes. A member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, Clayton received his undergraduate education at Northern Illinois University and a Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology in 1970. He joined the Stanford University faculty after completing postdoctoral work at the City of Hope National Medical Center and was promoted to professor of pathology in 1982 and professor of developmental biology in 1989. Clayton was also associate director of the Beckman Center for Molecular and Genetic Medicine at Stanford.

Clayton became an HHMI vice president in 2000. Since that time, he has played a key role in the early planning for the Janelia Farm Research Campus and in heading HHMI's science program, including the organizing of the two most recent competitions for new HHMI investigators.