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# Final Report on the 19th International Congress of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Joel H. Weiner, Congress President

The 19th International Congress of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is now history. It was truly a case of the phoenix rising from the ashes. As you all know, we were not at all certain that a Congress would occur. The SARS situation in Toronto made the final stages of planning difficult. We hoped that the scare would subside and travel to Toronto would pick up, however the second flurry of cases in May proved too much, and we had to cancel the Toronto Congress. Many of our key speakers expressed concern about travel to Toronto and many institutions around the world would not let their scientists travel to Toronto. At the time it seemed like 6 years of work by a very dedicated group would come to naught. In addition the National Research Council was straddled with a serious debt resulting from all the monies expended in planning and advertising the Congress that would not be recovered. At this time I received a call from John Bergeron and Sean Taylor who were planning the 2nd Human Proteomics Congress in Montreal in October. They had the Montreal Convention Center booked and capacity to handle a joint meeting. How lucky could we be! In a very short period of time we were able to negotiate a contract between CSBMCB, NRC, IUBMB, HUPO and Events International, the company organizing the Montreal Congress. Amazingly Mike Walsh, Chair of our Program Committee, and Wehbeh Barghachie, Chair of the HUPO Program Committee were able to mould an outstanding and seamless scientific program in a matter of days. They were able to put together an IUBMB Congress program of 35 symposia and 133 speakers that would mesh and complement the HUPO scientific program. Mike designed the scientific program to appeal to a very broad range of biochemists, molecular biologists and cell biologists

and we all owe him our gratitude. We were also able to schedule most of our plenary and award lectures and the poster sessions. This, coupled with the proteomics symposia and poster sessions organized by HUPO, provided an outstanding scientific program for over 2000 participants. An excellent social program, including a concert at Notre Dame Cathedral and a "Taste of Montreal" in the old Windsor Station, added to the outstanding menu of science enjoyed by the participants. In addition we were even able to host a Young Scientist Program organized by Dr. Fred Palmer. About 100 young investigators received travel and financial support to attend the Congress.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the National Research Council, Hamid Jorjani, Pierre Lamoureux and Laurier Forget for all their efforts in organizing the original Toronto meeting, for accepting full financial responsibility for the cancelled Congress and for forgiving the debt owed to NRC by the CSBMCB.

Staging an International Congress of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is a labour of love involving the volunteer time of a large number of scientists as well as the work of a team of professionals. In this final report to the membership I must acknowledge the efforts of the original IUBMB Congress organizing committee. Planning and organization of this Congress began over 6 years ago with the preparation of a bid to IUBMB by Sean Brosnan and the late Peter Dolphin. I would like to highlight the efforts of Dr. Peter Lewis, who chaired the Local Organizing Committee for Toronto who did yeoman's service in organizing a multitude of events that were not to be, Yvonne Lefebvre who served as General Secretary, and Gene Tustanoff and David Andrews who represented CSBMCB.

I would like to thank Jack Priess, past

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President of PABMB, who represented PABMB on the Organizing Committee and William Lennarz who served on the Executive in his capacity as Meeting Liaison for IUBMB. The executive of IUBMB, including past President Brian Clark and current president Mary Osborn, provided a great deal encouragement and financial support for the Young Scientist program, and I would also like to thank them for funding for several plenary lectures. I am especially thankful to Dr. Fred Palmer for re-organizing this event after cancellation of the Toronto YSP.

I really need to single out Michael Walsh and his Program Committee who worked day and night in May and June to resurrect a first class scientific program from the original Toronto program.

Finally, staging an international Congress is an expensive undertaking and fundraising is an important activity. I would like to thank Dr. Gerard Tertzakian who chaired the IUBMB fundraising committee and devoted untold hours working with potential donors. Through his efforts we were able to raise several hundred thousand dollars in direct and in-kind contributions, most of which was transferred to the Montreal Congress helping to make for a successful meeting.

The world changed significantly between 1996 and 2003. We could never have imagined the impact on travel and scientific exchange of the events of September 11, the Iraq war and SARS. I want to thank all the members of the CSBMCB who helped us weather these events.