

cate a widespread and serious health problem in our Nation—a problem which requires large-scale efforts in searching for a solution.

The urgency of this need and the indisputable public support for efforts to relieve this situation is reflected in the results of a late 1965 Gallup poll.

This report indicated that blindness is the second most-feared affliction of the American people, exceeded only by cancer. In other words, the loss of vision is more frightening to the citizens of this country than heart disease, paralysis, tuberculosis, and polio.

This, to me, constitutes a plea for action.

As an initial step to finding a solution, I have introduced H.R. 586 which provides for the separation of the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Blindness into its two major component parts, with the name of the “National Eye Institute” given to the research institution involved in work on visual diseases and malfunctions.

The fact remains that the causes of 80 percent of all visual afflictions are unknown at this time because of lack of extensive research in this area.

Dr. Thomas D. Duane, Research Study Director of Research to Prevent Blindness testified before a congressional committee in 1965 that—

No substantial reduction in incidence of eye disease and blindness can be anticipated in the absence of an adequately financed research program to find and eliminate the causes of disease.

Diseases which we do not now understand.

Although the agency report did not recommend the establishment of a National Eye Institute divorced from the National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Blindness, it did enthusiastically state that “there is an undeniable need for effective leadership for the national eye research effort. The existence of a position as Institute Director would be an important incentive to recruitment.”

I believe that a concentrated eye research program is a vital necessity for the maintenance of the health and comfort of a very large proportion of the American population.

Visual problems cannot receive the attention they need if structurally maintained as a subsidiary part of a research institution with widespread interests, such as the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness.

Ophthalmic study, because of its increased importance to the health of our Nation, must be granted independent status, which is a prerequisite to further significant progress.

This view is supported by one of the most eminent scientists in the field of ophthalmology when he said:

“The creation of a separate Institute would be the most important thing that has ever happened to ophthalmology.”

At present, we are linked to a predominantly neurological division of the National Institutes of Health which, however, gracious, can never understand fully the problems and requirements of ophthalmology.

Under the present system, we are committed to being a small appendage with minor ophthalmic representation in the administration—ophthalmic research is now sufficiently established that a separate Institute might well be justified.