

The more than 450,000 in our Nation, the additional 30,000 who are blinded every year, and the 31½ million Americans suffering from serious noncorrectable visual defects eagerly await our decision.

Mr. JARMAN. Thank you very much.

Are there any other questions or comments on Mr. Eilberg's statements?

Mr. ROGERS. I am certainly delighted to see our colleague here today.

May I say to you, sir, that I, and I am certain the other members of the committee, too, appreciate your statement.

Mr. JARMAN. Thank you, Mr. Eilberg. We do appreciate very much the contribution you have made here today.

Our next witness will be the Honorable Frank Horton. Please proceed Mr. Horton.

STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK J. HORTON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Mr. HORTON. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate having this opportunity to appear before you and the other distinguished members of this committee to urge your favorable action on the proposal to establish a National Eye Institute within the National Institutes of Health.

I have sponsored legislation to establish such an Institute in both the 89th and 90th Congresses. If this Nation is to effectively combat blindness we must implement a vast and well coordinated research effort to determine the causes of blindness and to develop effective prevention and treatment techniques. This effort must be followed up with an educational program to better inform the American public about this dread condition. To achieve these goals I believe a separate administrative unit should be created within the National Institutes of Health which could devote its full efforts and resources to this campaign.

The administration continues to oppose such legislation arguing that the creation of an independent agency to lead the fight against diseases of the eye will fragment and isolate that activity from other related endeavors. I certainly do not believe that this is a necessary result of establishing a National Eye Institute. On the contrary, I believe that the establishment of such a centralized institute for eye research would attract the most talented and dedicated men and women of ophthalmic and related sciences because it would offer them the unique opportunity to participate meaningfully and effectively in the struggle to eliminate vision defects and blindness. Such an institute would also bring about a more realistic balance between financial support of the blind and research into the causes and treatment of blindness.

Despite the fact that this Nation possesses the financial resources and scientific capability to provide our citizens with the best protection in the world against disease, 80 percent of the cases of serious visual impairment are caused by disease rather than accidents. This fact indicates to me that there is a serious deficiency in our present programs to prevent and treat blindness, and blinding diseases.

The fact that most people regard accidents as the major cause of blindness indicates that there is also a serious deficiency in the public's understanding of blindness. This is further illustrated by the fact that fewer than one-half of our fellow Americans even identify glaucoma