

Mr. Chairman, there is a genuine need to focus more attention on eye care and eye problems, concerning which there is a surprising degree of ignorance and fear among our people. There is no advertised commodity on the market through which public awareness is promoted and through which people are encouraged to care for their eyes and have regular examinations. Cosmetics have not been to the eyes what toothpaste has been to dental care. A program of public education would be an important part of the proposed Institute's activities.

I believe there is a critical shortage of ophthalmologists in our country. I have been told that this specialty has not developed and grown as well as some of the others. There are 8,272 ophthalmologists in the United States—about one for every 25,000 persons. About 50 of these eye specialists are in Government or military establishments, about 75 in full-time research, and about 300 in hospitals and medical schools. Of course, the pursuit of knowledge concerning abnormal functioning of the eyes is not left to physicians alone; there are many others in the basic scientific disciplines who are skilled investigators and who are searching for causes, cures, and treatments. It might even be said that eye doctors in the course of practice are contributing to research and understanding.

The fact remains, however, that more eye specialists are needed for treatment of patients and for research. A separate Eye Institute would encourage more young people to prepare as technicians in studies of the eye or take up the full course of study for ophthalmology. It would also provide the needed resources for an expanded training program.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the establishment of a National Eye Institute is essential. A relatively small investment would enable our scientists to bring the scourge of blindness under control and eventually cure or prevent eye diseases. Public knowledge of such a center would create awareness of eyesight problems and promote proper care and examination. Federal action in this matter would stimulate support in other sectors: State, community, foundations, and other private organizations. A further and important outcome would be to encourage people to enter the field of ophthalmology where a critical shortage exists. Also, any major advance or discovery which would significantly reduce the growth rate of blindness would soon reduce public assistance payments to the blind. Such payments average close to \$100 million annually. It is not unthinkable that an Eye Institute would eventually pay for itself.

Mr. Chairman, our international health organizations today are making plans for the total eradication of certain diseases, such as malaria and smallpox. They can do so realistically because they know the cause of these and similar diseases. Why do we not seek a like understanding of the causes of blindness with a greater dedication and determination? Perhaps 5 or 10 years from now we would be able to set a national goal for the eradication of blindness. A National Eye Institute is the next step in that direction. I hope the committee will approve this legislation.

Mr. JARMAN. Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Rodino.

Mr. RODINO. Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. JARMAN. We have several other Members to hear from before we hear the testimony of Dr. Stewart, Surgeon General. At this time we will hear from Mr. Gilbert, of New York.