

Health is a basic human right. Its enemy—disease—respects no geographical boundaries. It discriminates against no one—irrespective of political belief, social or economic status, race or religion.

The establishment of a National Eye Institute would have a major effect upon our efforts to attack the causes of blinding eye diseases. Medical research, under the guidance of the Eye Institute, could be directed to the study of blinding eye diseases and visual disorders including research and training in the special health problems and requirements of the blind and in the basic sciences relating to the mechanism of sight and visual function.

In 1961 in the first of three annual health messages to Congress, President Kennedy stated:

The health of the American people must ever be safeguarded; it must ever be improved. As long as people are stricken by a disease which we have the ability to prevent, as long as people are chained by a disability which can be reversed, . . . then American health will be unfinished business. It is to the unfinished business in health—which affects every person and home and community in this land—that we must now direct our best efforts.

We in the Congress must continue to recognize the urgency and seriousness of the problem of eye diseases and its effect on our economy, by reason of increased welfare costs to our cities, States and Nation for the care of the blind. It is hoped that with the establishment of the National Eye Institute, a more orderly and better coordinated war against blinding eye disease and blindness may be waged and that ultimately, the fight for sight will be won. At the very least the causes of blinding eye disease will be more expeditiously uncovered and cures found. Only then will it be feasible and practical to seek a merger of some of the numerous voluntary agencies in the eye research field. Such a move will better enable government and private voluntary agencies to coordinate their activities to the end that we may save many of our citizens from the scourge of blindness.

On March 7, 1966, I introduced H.R. 13358, a bill providing for a National Eye Institute devoted to research on blinding eye diseases, blindness and visual defects. But I do not want there to be any misunderstanding about my sponsorship of this bill. I want to state that the National Council to Combat Blindness, Inc., and its fight for sight will not be eligible to receive any funds directly or indirectly by the enactment of this legislation. The work of the National Eye Institute will be carried on under the direction of the Surgeon General, with the approval of the Secretary. The National Council to Combat Blindness, Inc., in cooperation with its fight for sight leagues, will continue to raise funds to supplement the work done by the National Eye Institute in such areas where the Institute may not be authorized to act. The fight for sight will also continue its work in the field of public information and education and guidance to individuals requesting information regarding available sources for assistance to blind persons.

Mr. Chairman, on February 10, 1966, I wrote to the members of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Fight for Sight, requesting their comments on the proposed National Eye Institute. A copy of their replies appear with my Congressional Record statement of March 8, 1966, which is attached as exhibit A.

The legislation which this distinguished subcommittee is now considering provides for the establishment of a National Eye Institute—