

Identical to the measure described in the above resolution, identical, too, to S. 325, introduced in the Senate in the 90th Congress by Senator Hill, joined by 50 of his colleagues—and I have attached a copy of S. 325 to my printed testimony that you might see the broad cross-section support for it in the other Chamber—H.R. 10780 would not only authorize the establishment of a National Eye Institute to issue grants for research into the causes of blindness as would the other numerous similarly named bills now pending before this committee, but H.R. 10780 would also empower the agency to conduct research in this field itself.

Mr. Chairman, statistics may be cited to show the seriousness of the visual defect problem in this Nation, the great need to determine the basic causes of defective vision, and the pressing need for the establishment of a Federal institute whose sole function it is to coordinate, finance, and conduct research into the causes of blindness, that the nature of sight-impairing and sight-destroying diseases may be discovered and eliminated from the experience of all mankind.

About 420,000 Americans have 10 percent or less vision, and about 55,000 of this number are totally blind.

More than 1 million Americans are unable to read regular newspaper, even with the aid of glasses.

Nearly 90 million have, to some degree, impaired vision.

About 30,000 Americans, adults and children, become blind each year.

But the most startling and disturbing statistic on visual impairment in America is that 80 percent of all blindness is the result of diseases whose causes are unknown to science.

Then, Mr. Chairman, there are the dollars and cents statistics:

The cost of providing public assistance to nearly 100,000 needy blind American adults.

The cost of providing special facilities, teachers, textbooks, and materials required in the education of more than 20,000 elementary and secondary school-attending blind American children.

The cost of providing training centers and facilities, of providing adjustment to blindness help and other specially needed services to newly blind Americans, and to Americans who have been without sight for years and undiscovered or neglected.

The cost of providing vocational rehabilitation programs and training facilities to offer occupational retraining and job placement help to employable blind Americans.

The cost of providing braille and recorded books for the blind, the structures to house them, the personnel to circulate them.

But, Mr. Chairman, although we of the National Federation of the Blind cite frequency of blindness and visual impairment figures, we do so that you may understand the extent of this problem in our Nation.

Although we cite a variety of tax-provided special services to blind people, we do so that you may better understand the dollars and cents cost of blindness and severe visual impairment in our society.

But we would urge your approval of H.R. 10780, not for the statistical reasons given, but because we know that, too often, a disease which destroys a man's sight, also destroys his dreams and possibilities.