

111TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. RES. 209

Recognizing the 40th anniversary of the National Eye Institute and expressing support for designation of the years 2011 through 2020 as the “Decade of Vision”.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 7, 2009

Mr. ISAKSON (for himself and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution;  
which was considered and agreed to

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## RESOLUTION

Recognizing the 40th anniversary of the National Eye Institute and expressing support for designation of the years 2011 through 2020 as the “Decade of Vision”.

Whereas vision impairment and eye disease are major public health problems, especially due to the aging of the population;

Whereas there is a disproportionate incidence of eye disease in minority populations;

Whereas vision loss as a result of diabetes and other chronic diseases costs the people of the United States \$68,000,000,000 each year in health care expenses, lost productivity, reduced independence, diminished quality of life, increased depression, and accelerated mortality;

Whereas approximately 38,000,000 people in the United States over 40 years of age currently experience blindness, low-vision, or an age-related eye disease, and this number is expected to grow to 50,000,000 by 2020, as the tidal wave of approximately 78,000,000 baby boomers who will begin to reach 65 years of age in 2010, many of whom will continue working well beyond age 65, crashes;

Whereas, in public opinion polls conducted during the past 40 years, people in the United States have consistently identified fear of vision loss as second only to fear of cancer, and, as recently as 2008, a study by the National Eye Institute showed that 71 percent of respondents indicated that a loss of eyesight would have the greatest impact on their life;

Whereas, with wisdom and foresight, Congress passed an Act entitled “An Act to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for the establishment of a National Eye Institute in the National Institutes of Health” (Public Law 90–489; 82 Stat. 771), which was signed into law by President Johnson on August 16, 1968;

Whereas the National Eye Institute (in this resolution referred to as the “NEI”) held the first meeting of the National Advisory Eye Council on April 3, 1969;

Whereas the NEI leads the Federal commitment to basic and clinical research, research training, and other programs with respect to blinding eye diseases, visual disorders, mechanisms of visual function, preservation of sight, and the special health problems and needs of individuals who are visually-impaired or blind;

Whereas the NEI disseminates information aimed at the prevention of blindness, specifically through public and professional education facilitated by the National Eye Health Education Program;

Whereas the NEI maximizes Federal funding by devoting 85 percent of its budget to extramural research that addresses a wide variety of eye and vision disorders, including “back of the eye” retinal and optic nerve disease, such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy, and concomitant low vision, and “front of the eye” disease, including corneal, lens, cataract, and refractive errors;

Whereas research by the NEI benefits children, including premature infants born with retinopathy and school children with amblyopia (commonly known as “lazy eye”);

Whereas the NEI benefits older people in the United States by predicting, preventing, and preempting aging eye disease, thereby enabling more productive lives and reducing Medicare costs;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in basic research, working with the Human Genome Project of the National Institutes of Health to translate discoveries of genes related to eye disease and vision impairment, which make up  $\frac{1}{4}$  of genes discovered to date, into diagnostic and treatment modalities;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in clinical research, funding more than 60 clinical trials (including a series of Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Trials Networks, in association with the National Institute for Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disorders) which have developed treatment strategies that have been determined by the NEI to be

90 percent effective and to save an estimated \$1,600,000,000 each year in blindness and vision impairment disability costs;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in prevention research, having reported from the first phase of its Age-Related Eye Disease Study that high levels of dietary zinc and anti-oxidant vitamins reduced vision loss in individuals at high risk for developing advanced age-related macular degeneration by 25 percent, and, in the second phase of Age-Related Eye Disease Study, studying the impact of other nutritional supplements;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in epidemiologic research, identifying the basis and progression of eye disease and the disproportionate incidence of eye disease in minority populations, so that informed public health policy decisions can be made regarding prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in collaborative research across the National Institutes of Health, working with the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to identify factors that promote or inhibit new blood vessel growth, which has resulted in the first generation of ophthalmic drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration to inhibit abnormal blood vessel growth in the form of age-related macular degeneration commonly known as the “wet” form of age-related macular degeneration, thereby stabilizing, and often restoring, vision;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in collaborative research with other Federal entities, and its bioengineering research partnership with the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy has resulted in a retinal

chip implant, referred to as the “Bionic Eye”, that has enabled individuals who have been blind for decades to perceive visual images;

Whereas the NEI has been a leader in collaborative research with private funding entities, and its human gene therapy trial with the Foundation Fighting Blindness for individuals with Leber Congenital Amaurosis, a rapid retinal degeneration that blinds infants in their first year of life, has demonstrated measurable vision improvement even within the initial safety trials;

Whereas, from 2011 through 2020, the people of the United States will face unprecedented public health challenges associated with aging, health disparities, and chronic disease; and

Whereas Federal support by the NEI and related agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services is essential for prevention, early detection, access to treatment and rehabilitation, and research associated with vision impairment and eye disease: Now, therefore, be it

1       *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2               (1) recognizes the 40th anniversary of the NEI,  
3       commends the NEI for its leadership, and supports  
4       the mission of the NEI to prevent blindness and to  
5       save and restore vision;

6               (2) supports the designation of the years 2011  
7       through 2020 as the “Decade of Vision”, to—

8               (A) maintain a sustained awareness of the  
9       unprecedented public health challenges associ-

1 ated with vision impairment and eye disease;  
2 and

3 (B) emphasize the need for Federal sup-  
4 port for prevention, early detection, access to  
5 treatment and rehabilitation, and research; and

6 (3) commends the National Alliance for Eye  
7 and Vision Research, also known as the “Friends of  
8 the National Eye Institute”, for its efforts to expand  
9 awareness of the incidence and economic burden of  
10 eye disease through its Decade of Vision 2011–2020  
11 Initiative.

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