

Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
NIH Reform Act of 2006: Progress, Challenges, and Next Steps
Opening Statement
September 9, 2008

Good Morning and welcome back to all my colleagues from the five week district work period. Today the Subcommittee is meeting to discuss the progress, the challenges and the work that still needs to be done to meet the expectations outlined in the NIH Reform Act that was passed in 2006.

For over a century the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has played a fundamental role in the advancement of biomedical, behavioral and population-based research. NIH translates cutting-edge research into practical applications. This work has led to the development of new diagnostic tools which have permitted early detection of numerous diseases, and have produced innovative treatments that have saved millions of lives and profoundly improved the lives of many others.

Federal investment in NIH research has led to groundbreaking discoveries in the fight against cancer, diabetes, heart disease and numerous other conditions that impact the lives of all American families. For the most part, there is a mutual understanding of the importance of this research and public education, which, up until recent years was reflected in a bipartisan effort to double funding for the NIH. Democrats and Republicans were united in ensuring NIH had the resources it needed to continue its mission.

This however, is no longer the case. As the priorities of this Administration have shifted toward broad tax cuts and increased funding for defense and the war in Iraq, there is not enough money to fund domestic priorities including the vital

research conducted by the NIH. The president's FY 2009 budget proposal was no different. He has yet again requested flat funding for the NIH, which, if adjusted for inflation, would represent a 14 percent cut in funding; and has threatened to veto any domestic spending bill that exceeds his request.

This administration is willing to spend \$12 billion each month on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but has abandoned its commitment to the medical research that will help provide life saving treatment to our returning veterans and millions of other Americans. While one-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from debilitating mental illnesses and while the rate of suicide among our nation's heroes is now double that of the general population, mental health research has remained relatively flat for years.

We also have a great need for further research into traumatic brain injury. It is estimated that 10 to 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have experienced traumatic brain injury from exposure to roadside bomb blasts, but show no outward signs of the condition. This, coupled with our current limited understanding of the condition and its symptoms is resulting in many of our military personnel suffering with little hope of getting better. We have an obligation to our war heroes and to all Americans to ensure that this lack of investment in medical research ends. We must increase the funding levels for NIH to improve diagnosis and treatment of these debilitating injuries and diseases.

We are in danger of losing ground to other nations that are making medical and biotechnical research more of a priority. This cannot continue without devastating results. We must recommit to provide the NIH the funding it needs to continue the innovative research that has brought hope to so many Americans.

In the 2006 Act, Congress asked the National Institutes of Health to report on their work and required them to reorganize and use limited funds in a more effective and efficient way. We also required them to release a biannual report detailing this activity and laying out the Institutes' progress. The first report was just released a few weeks ago and today we will be hearing from Dr. Zerhouni, Director of the NIH on how the requirements laid out by Congress in 2006 are being implemented. I am eager to hear about the organizational changes and strategic planning activities that have taken place at NIH since the passage of the Act, as well as the cross-institute initiatives that have been implemented.

As we discuss the next steps in our continued effort to improve the NIH, it is vital that we all work together to make sure it is as strong and effective as possible, not only through organizational change, but also through a renewed commitment to providing the funding necessary to continue the great work of the agency. I hope that we can all work together to further this mission.

I would like to welcome our witness, Dr. Zerhouni, the Director of the National Institute of Health; thank you for being here. I look forward to your testimony. I now recognize my colleague Mr. Deal for an opening statement.