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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES AND
EDUCATION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,
JUSTICE, STATE AND JUDICIARY

FOUNDER AND VICE-CHAIRMAN
NATIVE AMERICAN CAUCUS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2007

Dr. Elias Zerhouni
Director
National Institutes of Health
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

I am writing to bring to your attention report language in the FY 2008 NIH appropriations legislation concerning basic behavioral science:

Basic behavioral research.—The Committee is aware that basic behavioral research focused on such areas as cognition, perception, emotion, social interaction, and learning have led to important advances and improved treatments for depression, bipolar and other affective disorders, diabetes, compliance on behavior change related to diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity, and more effective public health announcements and interventions. In view of the fact that eight out of the ten leading causes of death have a significant behavioral component and that basic research is the underpinning of advances in behavioral research, the Committee is concerned with the continued lack of focus of scientific leadership at NIH for this important field of science. However, the Committee views the new Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI) within the Office of the Director as a potentially important source of leadership in encouraging NIH investment in behavioral science research. The recent NIH reauthorization placed OBSSR within OPASI. As OPASI begins to perform its function of analyzing balance and content in all areas of NIH research, it would be appropriate for OPASI to set as an initial task a review of the NIH basic behavioral research portfolio. The Committee requests that the Director of NIH instruct OPASI, using OBSSR expertise, to prepare a strategic plan for basic behavioral research. This plan should include the amounts spent in fiscal years 2006 and 2007, by institute and center, on basic behavioral research, and a plan for NIH's investment in basic behavioral research for fiscal year 2008 and beyond. This strategic plan should also identify any gaps in the NIH basic behavioral research portfolio. The Committee expects to receive the strategic research plan no later than May 1, 2008. (H.R. 110-231, pp. 156-157)

Along with many colleagues in the House and in the Senate, I have been advocating for a basic behavioral research and training program at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS). It is more critical than ever to ensure that basic behavioral science has a stable and secure home within NIH. The importance of such research has already been widely documented, including by your own Advisory Committee's recommendation that an institute like NIGMS should house this kind of basic behavioral science. Yet, there has been no focused NIH leadership shown for the excellent research that no longer is

supported at NIMH. This is an issue I first brought to your attention as early as 2004. I was glad you convened such a distinguished panel to advise you on this matter following my earlier discussion with NIH Deputy Director Raynard Kington. But it is my view that the language included by the House (above) which calls for an OPASI-led strategic plan for basic behavioral research at NIH, will facilitate and assist with the establishment of scientific leadership at NIH for basic behavioral research.

It is my hope that we can continue to work on this issue together in support of basic behavioral science research as a priority for NIH in 2008.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick J. Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress