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Statement of Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)

At the Hearing of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education, and Related Agencies to Review the Administration's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request for the National Institutes of Health

As Prepared for Delivery

“The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education will now come to order.

“Dr. Collins, welcome back to the Subcommittee. And thank you for bringing with you four of the 27 distinguished scientists who lead the various institutes and centers at the National Institutes of Health: Dr. Harold Varmus from the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Tony Fauci from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Griffin Rodgers from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, and Dr. Susan Shurin from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

“This Subcommittee holds an appropriations hearing on the NIH budget every year, and every year I am both inspired by the dedication of the scientists who testify before us and proud that their accomplishments have made America the world leader in biomedical research.

“But in recent years, our Nation's status in that regard has been threatened. While China and other Asian countries make large investments in research, here in the United States, we're pulling back. The fiscal year 2011 appropriations bill that Congress passed last month cut NIH funding by \$322 million below the fiscal year 2010 level. When you consider how much funding was needed to keep up with inflation, the cut was more like \$1.3 billion.

“We should be thankful that the result wasn't significantly worse. H.R. 1, the spending bill passed by the House majority, would have cut NIH funding by \$1.6 billion, or \$2.6 billion counting inflation. Fortunately, the Senate majority rejected that plan.

“But even the compromise bill that was ultimately signed into law will result in a success rate for NIH research grants of just 17 or 18 percent, meaning just one out of every six peer-reviewed applications will be approved. That's the lowest success rate on record for NIH.

“And there is cause to fear even bigger cuts next year. The budget plan approved by the House last month would cut health funding by 9 percent in fiscal year 2012. If that plan were approved, severe

reductions to NIH research would be unavoidable.

“That doesn’t make sense. Let’s set aside for a moment any thoughts about the moral value of trying to improve people’s health, and look at the issue purely from an economic point of view. NIH research is one of the best investments this country can make.

“A study released yesterday by United for Medical Research concluded that in fiscal year 2010, NIH funding supported almost 500,000 jobs across the country. Remember that only a small percentage of NIH funding goes to Bethesda, Maryland. Most is awarded to researchers at academic institutions all over the United States.

“Another study, by Battelle, examined the specific impact of the Human Genome Project, which was overseen by Dr. Collins and completed in 2003. The Federal Government spent a total of \$3.8 billion on this historic initiative. That’s a lot of money. But the return on investment was staggering. According to this study, that \$3.8 billion translated into an economic output of \$796 billion between 1988 and 2010. And of course, we’ll be seeing benefits from the Human Genome Project for many more decades to come.

“The lesson is clear. Biomedical research is one of the engines that drive our economy. If we want our economy to grow, both immediately and in the long term, that engine needs fuel. Drastically cutting NIH, as the House budget would force us to do, would be a classic case of penny-wise, pound-foolish thinking.

“I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. But first, I yield to Senator Shelby for his opening statement.”