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### LOANS TO STUDENTS OF OPTOMETRY

Addendum to hearings held May 26 and June 22, 1964, on H.R. 8546

(NOTE.—The following statements were inadvertently omitted when the above hearings were printed.)

STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY HON. JAMES C. CLEVELAND, MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES FROM THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, SECOND DISTRICT, IN SUPPORT OF THE PASSAGE OF H.R. 8546.

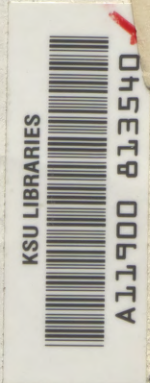
Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it has come to my attention that Paul Q. Peterson, M.D., representing the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, appeared before this committee on May 26 and opposed the passage of H.R. 8546, the reason given being that there was no need for additional loan funds for optometry students.

As a member of the House Select Committee on Government Research, it has come to my attention that a Neurological and Sensory Disease Service of HEW approved a project grant No. 99 for the purpose of training ophthalmic assistants in order that ophthalmologists could "spend more time with the treatment of the individual patient, can see more patients, and can fill up more of his time for dealing with individual problems as prevention of blindness in order to improve our standards of public health."

The same grant shows that only 1 percent of the medical students at the time of graduation rated ophthalmology as the most liked specialty while four times that number rated it as the least liked. Since 1935 only 2.6 percent of all graduates have chosen ophthalmology for postgraduate training. The grant also shows that of the time given to the 16 clinical subjects in which American medical students are trained, only 1½ percent of the time was allotted to ophthalmology. This shows clearly that the average physician has very little training in vision care.

In my opinion there is no question but that the country is faced with a shortage of both optometrists and ophthalmologists but the way to correct this situation is not to turn out a group of so-called ophthalmic assistants, but rather, first to increase the number of well-trained optometrists who are fully capable of detecting pathological conditions discovered in the course of a visual examination and referring the patient to a medical practitioner, and second, to train more ophthalmologists.

There is no provision in the laws of New Hampshire, or of any of the other 49 States, for the licensing of ophthalmic assistants. Whenever one would examine the vision of a patient and make findings, he must do so under the direct personal supervision of a licensed physician who is exempt from the optometry licensing laws, or he would be in violation of the law. Under these circumstances, the physician might



better perform the examination himself, as far as saving his time is concerned.

In my opinion, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is at fault for its failure to employ in its own organization the full-time services of a single optometrist and also for failure to utilize more of them in consulting capacities.

Certainly there can be no justification for the Department objecting to making Federal funds available for loan to optometry schools and colleges. The money will be repaid with interest and if it enables only one student from each State to complete his or her optometric education, it will be in the public interest.

It is my recommendation that this bill be reported promptly to the House and passed.

STATEMENT OF HON. HARRISON A. WILLIAMS, JR., A U.S. SENATOR  
FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak on behalf of legislation in which I am greatly interested. As you know, H.R. 8546 is identical with S. 2180 which I introduced to amend Public Law 88-129. This amendment is designed to extend to qualified schools of optometry and students of optometry those provisions in the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act which relate to student loan programs.

Our shortage of optometrists is something that must be corrected. More than 100 million Americans are in need of vision care. Among that number are a great many young people, as well as many of our older citizens. They require the kind of vision care that only a trained professional can provide. Of all Americans, in every age group, who seek vision care, about 75 percent are patients of optometrists. The optometrist's role in our society is therefore a very important one and carries with it a great responsibility. This is true not only in the city, but also in the rural areas where there are practically no eye physicians.

The everyday visual tasks of 100 years ago were simple compared to those which are required today of both young and old. Then, there were books and newspapers, but movies, television, radar screens, tolerances of infinitesimal dimensions, high-speed automobiles, airplanes, space capsules, nuclear power, and its utilization both in peace and war were never dreamed of a century ago. Each and every one of these presents a challenge to man's eyesight. To meet this challenge, we need more optometrists. Even our national game has its visual problems. Red Schoendienst, an outstanding baseball player, improved his batting average as the result of visual training given him by an optometrist.

During the 1950's the ratio of our population wearing spectacles increased more than 10 percent, and today two out of three adults are receiving professional eye-care services. As our need for advanced scientific and technical skills increases, and our civilization becomes more mechanized, not only will the demand for professional vision care rise, but vision requirements will also become more exacting.

A person's eyesight is one of his most precious possessions. The optometrist safeguards that possession.

Because his function is so vital to the Nation's welfare, it is important that he live among us in numbers sufficient to take care of our growing population's needs. This, unfortunately, is not the case.

The condition of the optometric profession in New Jersey is a good example of the need for this legislation. According to "The Blue Book of Optometry," which lists all licensed optometrists in this country, there were 856 optometrists in New Jersey in 1952. In 1962 the number had decreased to 739—representing a 14-percent decrease during a period when New Jersey's population had increased by 25 percent.

It is apparent that we must take an urgent look at our problem—the correlation between population and optometric manpower—and provide some aid to those young men and women who wish to enter this profession.

The testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Frauds and Misrepresentations Affecting the Elderly, of which I am chairman, proved conclusively that the untrained and the unscrupulous move in wherever there is a scarcity of professional people. The elderly as well as youngsters are among the groups most urgently in need of vision care. Vision devices are being foisted on the uninformed and gullible, which far from helping their vision problems often aggravate them.

In recent months attention has been focused on the matter of contact lenses. Several million Americans wear them. Fitting them properly requires great professional skill. In New Jersey, only an optometrist or a qualified physician is permitted to fit them. This is not true everywhere in the United States.

The public is entitled to protection against frauds and misrepresentation, and against those who are not professionally trained to provide vision care. To protect the public, however, we must have a sufficient number of professionals to provide the needed service.

There are only some 17,000 optometrists in full-time practice in this country. That is too small a number to handle the needs of 190 million Americans. There is also a shortage of certified eye physicians. So the combined shortage of professionals dealing with varying types of eye care makes it easy and profitable for unlicensed, untrained exploiters to enter the field of vision service. This alone is reason enough to do everything in our power to help those who want to join the ranks of trained professionals in the vision-care field. While vision is an individual asset, it has a vital relation to our national security and financial welfare.

From the Nation's point of view, vision's most dramatic use is in space conquest. The men who work on machines which will carry other men toward the stars, and the men who will be inside those machines which will take them to the new frontiers of the sky, need not merely 20/20 vision, but the best possible vision to perform their tasks.

The late President Kennedy said in a health message to Congress that "modern health care is extremely complex. It demands the services of a skilled and diversified team of specialists and technical personnel."

Optometrists certainly are an essential part of that team.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, your gracious attention to this statement is appreciated. Make available loans to the students who want to become optometrists, and who will become members of that skilled and diversified team of specialists, and you will have made a significant contribution to our Nation's future and well-being at practically no cost to the taxpayer.

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