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2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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FACSIMILE (202) 225-2525
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce “NCI Cancer Research: Today’s Progress; Tomorrow’s Challenges” Subcommittee on Health March 23, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Pallone, for holding this hearing today and giving us the opportunity to hear from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and our other witnesses about the Institute’s cancer research efforts.

Cancer is a complex disease. We know that genetic, environmental, and other factors all contribute to an individual’s risk for developing cancer. So discovering cures and developing effective treatments are complex, difficult, and expensive endeavors as well.

We have made tremendous progress in reducing cancer deaths and new cancer cases, due in large part to scientific advances over the last decade. However, cancer remains the second leading cause of death in this country and may soon overtake heart disease as the nation’s number one killer. One and a half million people are diagnosed with cancer each year. Eleven million people are cancer survivors.

Cancer is particularly devastating for members of certain communities. Racial and ethnic minorities experience disproportionately high rates of cancer cases and death.

All these individuals, their families, and friends know all too well the tremendous physical, emotional, and financial toll of this disease.

In the past five years, we’ve made great strides in combating certain forms of cancer, such as breast and cervical cancer. Other cancers pose new challenges. For example, while colorectal cancer rates have decreased overall, the number of people under 50 with this type of cancer is on the rise. And eight types of cancer – those that we often don’t hear much about – account for half of all cancer deaths. I know these so-called deadly cancers are of particular interest to Chairman Pallone, Mr. Shimkus, and other Members of the Subcommittee.

Today, we have an opportunity to learn more about cancer research conducted and supported by NCI – to better understand where we are and where we hope to go in making advances to beat this terrible disease. This research spans the continuum of discoveries – starting at the laboratory bench, then translating scientific breakthroughs into clinical application, and finally testing for safety and efficacy to determine if new innovations really work at the patients’ bedside. In every regard and throughout the world, NCI is considered the preeminent institution for biomedical research on cancer.

The research funded by NCI will enable us to discover and ultimately deliver the best possible prevention, detection, diagnosis, and treatment tools to all Americans. As we will hear, there is much to be excited about. And of course, there remains much work to do.

I want to thank Dr. Barker and all of our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to their testimony.