In the Winter/Spring 2018 edition of the Report, I spoke about vision research advocates being in the right place at the right time. I was referring to the February 9 NAEVR-hosted ARVO Advocacy Day held as Congress finalized the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 that increased spending caps for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019, as well as the March 22 NAEVR-hosted Private Funding Foundations Advocacy Day held during the House floor vote to finalize FY2018 appropriations.

I don’t know whether NAEVR Executive Director Jim Jorkasky has a crystal ball, but the third time was the charm as the NAEVR-hosted Emerging Vision Scientists (EVS) Advocacy Day was held as Congress passed, and the President signed, H.R. 6157, the Conference Report for the minibus spending bill that finalized FY2019 Department of Defense (DOD) and Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) appropriations. This included a $2 billion National Institutes of Health (NIH) increase and nearly $30 million more for vision research—a $24.2 million National Eye Institute (NEI) increase and a $5 million increase in the DOD/Vision Research Program (VRP) to a record level of $20 million! Again, vision researchers were among the first on Capitol Hill to thank Congress for this historic action, as the incoming fiscal year’s LHHS bill had not been finalized prior to the end of the current fiscal year in more than two decades.

As I hosted the September 27 EVS Congressional reception, I could sense the energy in the House Rayburn Building—from staff as well as from the twenty early-stage investigators. This year, a number of the EVSs presented research into therapies and technologies that are in development by a team in which they participate led by an NEI-funded Principal Investigator. As a consequence, they could demonstrate to staffers the potential return on the federal investment in vision research, especially in light of the recent increases.

I want to thank NEI Director of Extramural Science Programs Michael Steinmetz, PhD for joining me at the EVS reception and emphasizing NEI’s commitment to supporting the next generation of vision researchers, as well as event sponsor Research to Prevent Blindness and its President Brian Hofland, PhD and Board for their commitment to early-stage investigators.

As noted in the Report, we start all over again with advocacy for continued robust NIH/NEI funding increases in FY2020. NAEVR will be educating and developing champions in the new 116th Congress as that deliberative body faces several challenges—including a Trump Administration budget likely to propose spending cuts of at least five percent, as well as the resumption of Budget Control Act caps for NonDefense Discretionary spending that are well below actual FY2019 funding. As in past years NAEVR will be joining its advocacy colleagues in seeking a multi-year bipartisan budget deal that avoids potential cuts and enables increases.

On behalf of the Boards, I want to thank all of the Alliances’ members for their support during this important anniversary year. In early December, the Alliances will issue 2019 renewal invoices which are capped at the 2018 dues and contributions levels. I hope that, as you review this Report, you sense the record of work and accomplishment demonstrated through NAEVR advocacy and AEVR education. I appreciate your financial support, as well as your voice when NAEVR calls on you to contact Congress for robust NIH/NEI funding.

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We start all over again with advocacy for continued robust NIH/NEI funding increases in FY2020. — Dr. McDonnell