PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE
Cautious Optimism

Since the last edition of the Report, Congress has put its words into action with both the House and Senate proposing Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) appropriations bills that increase National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding—by $1.1 billion in the House and by $2 billion in the Senate. In fact, the Senate bill is responsive to the research community’s request for NIH funding of at least $32 billion, and although it does not meet NAEVR’s request for National Eye Institute (NEI) funding of $730 million, it would increase NEI funding above its pre-sequester FY2012 level.

The bipartisan show of support for the NIH by House and Senate appropriators has been echoed by House authorizers, as the Energy and Commerce (E&C) Committee has proposed in its 21st Century Cures Act authorized $1.5 billion increases for NIH per-year for the next three fiscal years and mandatory $1.75 billion per-year funding for the next five fiscal years for a new NIH Innovation Fund, to include funding for early-stage investigators. In the E&C’s hearings, and in those held by the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee as it develops its own Cures legislation, authorizers in a bipartisan fashion emphasized the need to adequately fund NIH.

This optimistic news must be tempered by caution, however, since Congress still has a long way to go in this appropriations cycle despite the start of FY2016 in less than three months. Democratic members, dissatisfied with the austere Budget Control Act cap funding levels in the Republican-led bills, have withheld support in the hope that Congress can arrive at a “grand bargain,” such as the December 2013 Murray-Ryan agreement that funded FY2014 and FY2015. Although this could lead to any number of outcomes, such as a full-year Continuing Resolution that funds FY2016 at the FY2015 level or even a grand bargain, there could be a disruptive government shutdown before any final action is taken.

NAEVR will continue to urge Congress to take a balanced approach to deficit reduction that includes NIH/NEI funding increases. NAEVR wishes to thank the ARVO Board of Trustees and Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) Department Chairs who signed onto letters to the House and Senate appropriations leaders urging support, as well as the hundreds of ARVO members who contacted their Congressional delegations. These actions complemented NAEVR’s advocacy efforts and AERV’s educational activities during the crucial June timeframe.

As you read the Report, you will see that it begins with NAEVR’s extensive activities in May at the ARVO Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. I want to thank the representatives from the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) for attending and meeting with researchers for four days regarding funding opportunities from the Vision Research Program (VRP). The VRP, funded at $10 million in FY2015, has once again been included in the House’s FY2016 funding bill, which would be the fourth year of this level of support.

Internally, the Alliances continue to see change. At their meetings at the ARVO Annual Meeting, the NAEVR and AERV Boards each elected Allergan Inc.’s Yehia Hashad, M.D. as a Director. And, after many years of service, Sabri Markabi, M.D. has stepped down due retirement from Alcon Labs, Inc. We wish to welcome Dr. Hashad and thank Dr. Markabi for his contributions.

As always, I want to thank the vision community organizations that have committed their financial resources and time to the Alliances in 2015. We are on the threshold of major resources for NIH/NEI, so we will continue to call upon you to raise your voices in support.

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