ARVO Advocacy Day

Participants on their way to the House included: Front Row: Robert Miller, M.D. (University of Minnesota); ARVO Executive Vice President Sally Atherton, Ph.D. (Medical College of Georgia); and Jeffrey Boatright, Ph.D. (Emory University); Back Row: Justine Smith, Ph.D. (Casey Eye Institute/University of Oregon); and Lori Grover, O.D. (Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University)

ARVO Members Among First to Educate Congress about ARRA-Funded Research

In an October 30 Advocacy Day hosted by NAEVR, the ARVO Board of Trustees was joined by local ARVO members as one of the first communities to educate Members of Congress and their staffs about the impact of ARRA-funded research. Timing was propitious, as NIH had just released an initial report on how the $10.4 billion in stimulus funding has been spent in FY2009, which had piqued Hill interest. ARVO members provided a useful context to the top line NIH numbers by describing the vision research awards that they and their institutions received from the $175 million in NEI stimulus funding. Three of the participating researchers—incoming ARVO President J. Mark Petrash, Ph.D., Shukti Chakravarti, Ph.D., and Justine Smith, Ph.D.—were direct recipients of ARRA-related NEI awards.

In addition to describing their work and sharing a NAEVR-generated fact sheet of examples of ARRA-supported NEI research that addresses basic, translational, epidemiologic, and comparative effectiveness research, participants also stressed economic impact in terms of employees retained or hired. Since healthcare reform legislation is also a current Congressional priority, participants commented on the potential for research that prevents blindness and restores vision to reduce costs, especially to the Medicare system, while increasing productivity and improving quality of life.

The ARRA discussion was a prelude to two important requests: that Congress finalize FY2010 NIH funding at the higher House bill level of 3.1 percent (3.57 percent for NEI), and that Congress fund NIH at a robust, predictable, and sustained level in FY2011, especially since stimulus funding expires in FY2010. In that regard, the ARVO advocates emphasized that, in both FY2009 and FY2010, NIH is supporting research at a level of $37 billion (base appropriations, plus half of the two-year stimulus).

ARVO was pleased to engage several international Trustees as participants. In addition to describing research being conducted in other countries, they emphasized the unique nature and important global leadership role of the NIH biomedical enterprise.