**Legislative Scorecard Issues—FY2013 Defense Vision Funding**

**CR Funds VTRP at $3.2 Million, House Bill Requested $10 Million**

As with NIH/NEI funding in the six-month Continuing Resolution, NAEVR estimates funding for the Vision Trauma Research Program (VTRP) in Defense appropriations at $3.2 million, the FY2012 level. The Department of Defense’s (DOD) Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC), which manages the VTRP, will need to determine if it proceeds with a Program Announcement or awaits final FY2013 appropriations.

The House’s FY2013 Defense Appropriations bill proposes VTRP funding at $10 million. Although the Appropriations Subcommittee reported out a bill that funded VTRP at $5 million, on July 18 during House floor debate, Cong Tim Walz (D-MN), the highest ranking enlisted veteran to serve in Congress and a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, was joined by Cong. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) in supporting a $10 million VTRP budget line in Defense appropriations. Cong. Walz had previously served as the author of a “Dear Colleague” letter to fellow House members urging VTRP funding at that level. On August 2, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a bill that includes vision in a $50 million pool of funds, not as a separate line item despite intense NAEVR advocacy.

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**Schepens Military Eye Symposium: AEVR Releases Defense Vision Brochure, DOD Announces $14 Million in Awards**

On September 18, at the Fifth Military Vision Symposium on Ocular and Vision Injury held by the Schepens Eye Research Institute/ Massachusetts Eye and Ear in Boston, Massachusetts, AEVR’s Decade of Vision 2010-2020 Initiative released a new brochure entitled Value of Defense-related Vision Research. Summarizing the last seven years of AEVR education and NAEVR advocacy to address deployment-related eye injuries from combat operations, the brochure describes how the VTRP budget line in Defense appropriations funds DOD-identified research gaps. AEVR will distribute the brochure to all Congressional offices. A downloadable version is available at www.eyeresearch.org.

Robert Read, the Vision Program Manager at DOD’s TATRC which manages the VTRP, announced $14 million in awards to a total of 21 vision researchers in its FY2011-2012 funding cycle. NAEVR will post awardee abstracts on its Web site when released by TATRC. The $14 million reflects Congressional appropriations of $4 million in FY2011 and $3.2 million in FY2012, plus $7 million transferred over from other DOD agencies due to the quality and responsiveness of the vision grants.

At the Symposium, researchers and clinicians addressed a variety of defense-related eye injury issues, including eye blast injuries, visual dysfunction as a result of TBI, inflammation and infection, ocular pain, and regenerative medicine. Meeting attendance included ophthalmologists and optometrists from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), vision researchers, and advocates for research, such as NAEVR and BVA. Meeting attendees were welcomed by Cong. Michael Capuano (D-MA), a champion for vision, who spoke about the importance of the research and advocacy for its funding in a tight fiscal environment.

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**Spirit of Project Gemini Lives Year Long**

In the Spring edition, NAEVR summarized its participation in the late May exchange between blind U.S soldiers and United Kingdom (UK) soldiers, called Project Gemini, which is a joint initiative between BVA in the U.S and Blind Veterans UK. The spirit of that initiative lives year long, as evidenced by these photos:

- At its late-August Annual Meeting in Galveston, Texas, BVA hosted many of the UK soldiers who participated in Project Gemini. Billy Baxter, a UK soldier blinded in Bosnia, visited NASA Mission Control near Houston.
- On September 19, BVA presented its National Legislative Recognition Award to Cong. Tim Walz (D-MN). Left to right: Tom Zampieri, Ph.D., Cong. Walz, Active Duty Marine Corps 1st Lt. Tim Fallon, and Steve Baskis, a veteran who lost his sight in Iraq and participated in Project Gemini.
- Steve, who is from Illinois, spent two days on Capitol Hill advocating for defense-related vision research, including meeting with staff from the office of Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), Senate Majority Whip and member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.
- Left to right: Former Optometric Consultant to the U.S. Air Force Colonel Ray Santullo, O.D., Acting National Program Director for VA Ophthalmology Glenn Cockerham, M.D. (Stanford University), and Chief of the Visual Services Branch of the U.S. Army’s Aeromedical Research Lab Lieutenant Colonel Jose Capo-Aponte, O.D., Ph.D.
- Past ARVO President Mark Petrasch, Ph.D. (University of Colorado at Denver) views the poster presented by NAEVR consultant Kevin Frick, Ph.D. (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) summarizing the Cost of Military Eye Injury and Blindness study.
- TATRC Vision Program Manager Robert Read announced $14 million in awards to 21 researchers in the FY2011-2012 VTRP funding cycle.
- Left to right: Joint DOD/VA Vision Center of Excellence (VCE) Director Colonel Donald Gagliano, M.D., Harvard Medical School Ophthalmology Department Chair Joan Miller, M.D., Cong. Michael Capuano (D-MA), and Massachusetts Eye and Ear President and CEO John Fernandez each welcomed attendees during the keynote session.
- On September 13, NAEVR joined Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) in a meeting of the House Democratic leadership with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs). BVA’s Tom Zampieri, Ph.D. urged the leaders to consider how to fund the VTRP at $10 million—which is the House’s intent—despite the CR. BVA and NAEVR are working with the Hill to explore options.

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