Although the NEI was flat-funded (as were most NIH Institutes) at $667.1 million in initial FY2008 appropriations, the Supplemental Appropriations Act signed by the President on June 30, 2008, provided $150 million in additional NIH funding, $3.5 million of which was programmed to the NEI, which also received $3 million for vision researchers from the NIH Director’s Bridge Fund within the common fund. Despite this $6.5 million increase in FY2008 over FY2007, NEI funding still did not keep pace with the biomedical inflation rate of 3.5 percent, which has resulted in an 18 percent loss of NEI purchasing power in the last five funding cycles.

Congress has yet to finalize FY2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) appropriations, which includes NIH/NEI funding. On September 30, the President signed a Continuing Resolution that flat-funds the NIH/NEI at the initial FY2008 funding level until March 6, 2009, by which time the 111th Congress must take action to finalize appropriations which were not already completed in the CR, as were the Defense, Military Construction/Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security spending bills.

**Champions Emphasize Power of Medical Research to Stimulate the Economy**

The $100.3 billion economic recovery package introduced by the Senate on November 18 included $1 billion for NIH. Whether an economic stimulus package that includes NIH funding moves in the lame duck session, early in 2009, or in concert with final FY2009 spending bills, it acknowledges the value of medical research to stimulate the economy both short- and long-term.

This was emphasized at a November 18 session held by the Society for Neuroscience, at which former NIH Director Harold Varmus, M.D. (President and CEO, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and science advisor to the Obama campaign), said that Congress now understands the short-term value of research grants—including salaries, indirect expenses with universities, supplies and equipment—to stimulate the economy, as well as the long-term return on investment, cited at 150 percent. Dr. Varmus was joined by Wendell Primus, Ph.D., Senior Policy Advisor to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and John Porter (Hogan & Hartson). Dr. Primus predicted that “research would be treated well in the next Administration and Congress,” adding that Speaker Pelosi “is a true believer.” This was echoed by Mr. Porter, who previously served as Chair of the House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee on which Speaker Pelosi formerly sat. Dr. Primus cautioned, however, that he was uncertain when potential NIH funding increases would be enacted, predicting that it would likely be when FY2009 appropriations are finalized.

Mr. Porter stated that, in addition to increases to “bring NIH back to where it should be after the impact of five cycles of flat funding and biomedical inflation,” NIH needs sustainable annual increases of 3 percent, plus the biomedical inflation rate (currently 3.5 percent). When asked about potential NIH reauthorization (NIH was reauthorized for three years by the NIH Reform Act of 2006), Dr. Varmus noted that it was unlikely in 2009, as the Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) that was created by the Act to make recommendations on the structure of NIH was just formed and had yet to meet.

"The Directors" (a band of NIH senior staff) plays such favorites as “Taking it E.Z.”, “King of the Road(map),” and “Run, Run, Run-away"