Contributor Report

House Passes NIH Reauthorization Bill; Senate Timetable Uncertain

On September 26, the House passed HR6164, the National Institutes of Health Reform Act of 2006, by an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 414-2. NAEVR immediately commended the House, as it was one of 51 organizations that endorsed the bill, formalized in a September 22 letter to E&C Committee Chairman Cong. Joe Barton (R-TX). At press time, and after NAEVR visits with leadership and ranking staff, the Senate HELP Committee was uncertain of timing for Senate action. Even if this issue is not taken up this session, the current House bill serves as the “floor” for further legislative action.

Readers of past Contributor Reports know that NAEVR’s number one priority has been to ensure that any NIH reauthorization bill does not jeopardize the ability of the NEI Director to lead the nation’s vision health commitment with a dedicated budget. In that regard, the final House bill eliminated the budget clusters proposed in previous drafts that were strongly opposed by NAEVR and the medical advocacy community. Additionally, the final bill aligned its provisions regarding expanded transparency, increased NIH Director discretion and establishment of a “common fund” for trans-Institute research with the recommendations issued by the IOM in its 2003 report entitled Enhancing the Vitality of the National Institutes of Health.

In reauthorizing the NIH for three years, the bill also authorizes funding increases of five percent for each year of fiscal years (FY) 2007-2009. In the September 20 markup, Cong. Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced amendments to increase funding by five percent above the biomedical inflation rate for each year, but this was voted down along party lines. In its letter to Chairman Barton, NAEVR offered its full support in urging Congressional leadership and appropriators to ensure these NIH funding increases.

Former E&C staff member Cheryl Jaeger, now in the office of Cong. Roy Blunt (R-MO), presents the final legislative draft on which she has worked for three years. She is joined by Dr. Jeff Allen of Friends of Cancer Research, with which NAEVR worked closely in advocacy.

NAEVR Board Director Cary Rayment (Alcon Laboratories) and E&C Chairman Joe Barton (R-TX) at an AdvaMed-sponsored session in which NAEVR participated. This was one of several NAEVR meetings with Chairman Barton this past year.