President’s Message

In Midst of Budget/Spending Battles, Vision Research Message Resonates Widely

Although Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 began on October 1, Congress has yet to finalize any spending bills, other than Defense. It returns December 3 for a planned two-week session in an attempt to finalize FY2008 appropriations bills, either through an omnibus measure or year-long funding resolution. The current budget/spending battle, in which Congress plans to spend $22 billion more than the President’s budget proposal—much of it on domestic programs, such as medical research—is fraught with several good news/bad news stories for our community.

For the first time in five years, Congress passed a Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) appropriations conference bill with increased National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding that would match inflation. In that regard, the research value message is being heard. However, Congress could not override the President’s veto of the bill—much of it on domestic programs, such as medical research—is fraught with several good news/bad news stories for our community.

As noted in the stories contained within, throughout this complex legislative process the vision research message has been shared widely and in various contexts—ranging from Hill briefings on rare eye diseases, combat-related eye injuries, and release of the Silver Book: Vision Loss on aging eye disease, to NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni acknowledging in multiple public venues NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving’s leadership with respect to the genetic basis of eye disease and research into blood vessel inhibition in the eye. Dr. Sieving’s “plain English” explanation of the genetic basis of eye disease at the recent Congressional briefing on Rare Eye Diseases not only resulted in multiple requests from staff to view vision research on-NIH campus and at extramural Institutions, but drew him praise from staffers for his simple-yet-dramatic examples of the value of research funding.

See Special Insert: NAEVR Releases Silver Book: Vision Loss

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On a positive note, the Defense spending bill retained eye and vision research’s eligibility for funding. The bill also includes additional funding for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)-related research, including that into visually-related neurological conditions. NAEVR will fully inform all networks of the funding opportunities these initiatives present, which could be substantial and build upon the $4.8 million received by defense-related vision researchers in calendar year 2007 from FY2006 funding.

As always, thank you for your support and commitment.

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