As reported in my end-of-year email, NAEVR was deeply engaged with the 109th Congress up to its adjournment on December 9, 2006, when it passed the
National Institutes of Health (NIH) Reform Act of 2006, which reauthorizes the NIH. Although this legislation is detailed in the next story, NAEVR and the medical research community can claim significant victories in revising initial legislative drafts such that the final bill:

- Maintains budget lines for individual Institutes/Centers, including the National Eye Institute (NEI)
- Maintains the appropriators’ oversight role, especially in seeking recourse on funding issues or NIH structural changes
- Creates a “Congressional mandate” to fund NIH at significantly higher levels

This legislation could not have been accomplished without the leadership and desire to compromise exhibited by 109th Congress authorizers—House Energy & Commerce Chair Cong. Joe Barton (R-TX) and Ranking Member Cong. John Dingell (D-MI) and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chair Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Ranking Member Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA)—as well as Senate appropriations leaders Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA). They developed a productive partnership that we hope continues through the three-year term of the reauthorization.

NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky and Legislative Counsel John Porter worked tirelessly with key Hill leaders/staff and medical research advocacy colleagues to present cogent, consistent reasons as to why key draft provisions could ultimately harm research. As John has said, NAEVR’s proactive, credible stance on this issue significantly raised the Alliance’s profile on Capitol Hill—and most significantly, that of the value of vision research conducted at the NEI.

Regarding the latter, Jim presented NEI accomplishments (such as the NEI/FDA Ophthalmic Clinical Endpoints meeting, detailed in this report) in terms of NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni’s overall goals such that he received a commendation letter from the NIH.

With Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations still not finalized, and the FY2008 budget/appropriations process forthcoming, NAEVR is using the goodwill it has established to urge a “plus-up” of FY2007 NIH funding, even if a year-long funding Continuing Resolution is enacted. NAEVR’s message was echoed by researchers participating in the January 19 ARVO Advocacy Day, detailed in this report, and will be enhanced further when Dr. Neil Bressler addresses Members of Congress and their staffs at the January 31 NAEVR Welcome Reception for the 110th Congress.

I appreciate your commitment to NAEVR/AEVR in 2007 and look forward to working with all network members.

—Stephen J. Ryan, M.D.
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