Early on December 9, 2006, the 109th Congress adjourned after passing several important pieces of legislation, including the National Institutes of Health Reform Act of 2006 to reauthorize NIH for the first time since 1993, which was signed by the President on January 15, 2007.

The final bill represented several Senate-generated “improvements” over HR 6164, passed by the House with overwhelming bipartisan support in late September, which was endorsed by NAEVR. These improvements—in response to the medical research advocacy community, including NAEVR—were generated by Senate appropriators and driven by Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Ranking Member Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA), in negotiations with Committee Chair Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) and House Energy and Commerce (E&C) Chair Joe Barton (R-TX).

The final bill retains the significant role of the appropriators in specifying line item budgets for the Institutes and Centers, the Office of the Director and of the newly created “common fund” for trans-Institute research, which will grow to five percent of the overall NIH budget. Both the authorizers and appropriators will play an active role in oversight of the expanded discretion provided to the NIH Director, including review of any management or structural changes recommended by the newly created Scientific Management Review Board.

NAEVR sent letters of appreciation to the Senate HELP/House E&C Committee and Senate/House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Members and staffs, offering to support the authorized funding increases and assist in implementation. NAEVR also congratulated NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni, noting that the November 28-29, 2006, NEI/FDA meeting (see accompanying story) was a timely example of NIH collaboration with other federal health entities—specifically the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—required in new reports to Congress. Full details appear in the NAEVR Web site Advocacy Center’s dedicated section on NIH Reauthorization.

On November 2, 2006, NAEVR Legislative Counsel John Porter was a featured speaker at an NIH Extramural Staff training session entitled *What’s Up, Doc? Communicating Health Research Progress*, where he addressed how Congress stays informed about science and biomedical research issues. This session is just one example of NIH Director Dr. Zerhouni’s efforts to ensure that program directors are prepared to communicate the value of research. NAEVR worked closely with NEI’s Dr. Grace Shen, the session chair, to engage Mr. Porter.