I was fortunate to have been in Washington, DC twice within the past few weeks, where I was engaged with the NAEVR Scorecard issues presented in detail in this report. I wish to thank Legislative Counsel John Porter and NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky and new Advocacy Manager David Epstein for arranging valuable visits with key leaders on the budget, appropriations and NIH reauthorization issues.

What struck me most about my time in Washington this year is how unified and vocal the research advocacy community is in influencing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget process early on, prior to the allocation of funds for each of the Appropriations bills. Our community has been at the forefront in that regard, and I thank the NAEVR network members who sent thousands of email letters to the Senate and House supporting the $7 billion increase to the budget for health and education programs in respective Budget Resolutions.

Although we are still awaiting final budget action on the House side, these Members of Congress know that they are dealing with a formidable constituency that will stay engaged through the entire budget and appropriations process. More than ever, the medical research advocacy community is holding elected representatives accountable for their voting record and whether it matches their stated support for healthcare and medical research.

To do this, however, we must ensure to fully educate our Members of Congress about the health and economic benefits derived from research conducted in their districts. I recently issued an invitation to Cong. David Dreier (R-CA), my home district representative, to visit Doheny. Fortunately, I was able to personally follow up by meeting with his senior staff in the Washington, DC office and “putting a face” to this research. I look forward to hosting Cong. Dreier and to maintaining an ongoing dialogue on our issues throughout this legislative session. I encourage all ophthalmic and optometric departments to do the same, as it also enables us to expand the value message of research, generally, and to increase the number of Congressional champions for eye and vision research, specifically.

Our community’s message has emphasized more than ever the vital role of the medical research infrastructure to our nation, from the promise it holds for new therapies to the jobs it creates that ensure our country’s competitiveness. This was most directly quantified by National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni in his April 6 testimony before the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee. I was especially pleased that Dr. Zerhouni cited three major National Eye Institute (NEI)-funded breakthroughs as evidence of value emerging from the NIH doubling.

Thank you for your commitment to NAEVR and AEVR, and I look forward to working with you to increase research funding.

— Stephen J. Ryan, M.D.
Doheny Eye Institute
NAEVR/AEVVR Boards President