NIH Reauthorization a Priority, per Chairman Barton

At a February 15 House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing, Chairman Joe Barton (R-TX) announced that NIH reauthorization is a priority this session, as the NIH has not been reauthorized since 1993. NAEVR has subsequently met with new lead Committee staff member Katherine Martin, who reported on plans to release a revision to the August 2005 legislative draft by late April 2006. Ms. Martin acknowledged the strong opposition from the medical research community (including NAEVR) to the previous draft’s proposal to cluster Institute budgets. She indicated that the revision would strike the cluster concept in favor of language—primarily from the 2003 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report which presented recommendations to modernize NIH—requiring an appropriate “reorganization” within a set timeframe in a three-year reauthorization period.

Since the “reorganization” language in lieu of budget clusters has yet to be shared with the advocacy community, NAEVR remains vigilant regarding the process for and ultimate impact from any reorganization, for example, creation of “informal” budget or management clusters. NAEVR’s greatest concern is that the NEI Director retain the authority and budget to lead our nation’s federal vision research efforts. We are also concerned about the authorizing levels for NIH funding over the next three years and whether a potential increase will be offered in exchange for the community’s support for structural changes. Finally, we remain concerned about the percent individual Institute contribution to and ability to direct funds associated with the “common fund”, the composition of the Director’s Advisory Council that will oversee trans-Institute research and any potential increase in the Director’s transfer authority greater than the current one percent.

During the weeks of March 27 and April 3, Dr. Stephen Ryan and Dr. James Chodosh (Dean McGee Eye Institute) made Capitol Hill visits with key Republican and Democratic members of the Committee, as well as the staff of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, which has NIH reauthorization jurisdiction on the Senate side. NAEVR updated staff, reiterated its concerns, promised all offices comprehensive comments once a draft issues and offered to serve as an ongoing resource.

NAEVR’s NIH Reauthorization Talking Points are at www.eyeresearch.org

Lantie Ferguson of the office of Cong. Gene Green, an Energy and Commerce Committee member and a Co-Chair of the Congressional Vision Caucus, with Dr. James Chodosh.

Dr. Chodosh, who was trained in Texas, added time to his participation in the American Academy of Ophthalmology Advocacy Day to conduct NIH reauthorization visits to Texas delegation offices.

Dr. Ryan with Katherine Martin of the Energy and Commerce Committee staff. Dr. Ryan served as a member of the IOM Committee that made recommendations to modernize NIH management.