On June 2, NAEVR met with House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Joe Barton (R-TX) and Cong. Darrell Issa (R-CA), an E&C Committee member. Chairman Barton announced that NIH reauthorization remains a priority. He intends to issue an NIH reauthorization legislative draft by mid-July 2006 that would significantly revise drafts from the July-August 2005 timeframe, about which NAEVR has commented extensively.

Chairman Barton’s highlights of the impending draft focused on the creation of a “common fund” for trans-Institute research and a base level of funding for each Institute within the three-year reauthorization cycle, with additional resources available through participation in trans-Institute research. Chairman Barton acknowledged that the previous drafts’ proposed budget clusters creating three budget line items for NIH—including that for the Office of the Director, “mission specific” Institutes (such as the NEI) and “science enabling” Institutes/Centers—has been a controversial issue that Committee staff is still addressing, potentially through expanded NIH Director discretion to implement organizational changes.

Comments about the need for expanded NIH oversight were also voiced during the June 7 House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee markup. While noting how impressed he was with the NIH, House Appropriations Committee Chair Jerry Lewis (R-CA) stated that he has urged NIH Director Zerhouni to “examine the programs that work and those that do not.” Even Cong. Mike Castle (R-DE), who led moderate Republican efforts to increase health and education funding in the House Budget Resolution, commented at a June 15 breakfast that “NIH is a significant budget expenditure and reauthorization potentially has more pros than cons.”

NAEVR has continued to educate staff of the House E&C/Senate HELP Committees about the vision community’s concerns with previous drafts. NAEVR supports the recommendations for NIH reform made in the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) Report, issued in 2003 and entitled Enhancing the Vitality of the National Institutes of Health. NAEVR has opposed the budget cluster concept since the NEI Director must retain the authority and

“Reauthorization would enable NIH to tell its story, educate Congress and prove its worth.”
—Cong. Mike Castle (R-DE) (above)

accompanying dedicated budget to lead the nation’s vision research commitment.

Visit www.eyeresearch.org to view NAEVR’s NIH Reauthorization Talking Points.