Working through NAEVR, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology’s (ARVO) members have lent their voices in emails, letters, and in personal visits with Congressional offices throughout the FY2008 appropriations process. At the early May Annual Meeting, ARVO members sent hundreds of letters in support of NIH/NEI funding increases from NAEVR’s Contact Congress booth in the ARVO pavilion. They redoubled those efforts with hundreds of letters to support the July 19 passage of H.R. 3043, the House FY2008 LHHS funding bill, with an NEI increase of nearly $10 million that is threatened by a potential Presidential veto of major funding bills since they exceed his proposed budget [see story inside].

On June 20, ARVO Trustee David Hunter, M.D., Ph.D., (Harvard University) visited the offices of the Massachusetts delegation, building upon visits made in October 2006. Although these Democratic offices have been supportive of NIH/NEI funding increases, the follow-up visits presented an opportunity to offer thanks and urge increased and timely FY2008 NIH/NEI appropriations.

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Making a Difference: One Researcher’s Story

In addition to being politically active locally, Linda McLoon, Ph.D. (University of Minnesota) has communicated frequently through NAEVR’s Contact Congress requests with her Members of Congress, including Cong. Betty McCollum (D-MN) who, in early 2007 with the start of the 110th Congress, was named to serve on the House LHHS Appropriation Subcommittee. Due to her past advocacy, Dr. McLoon’s request to meet with the Congresswoman’s office during her January 2007 trip to Washington, D.C. for an ARVO Program Planning Committee meeting was scheduled promptly. Dr. McLoon, an NEI-funded researcher, was joined by NAEVR’s James Jorkasky in meeting with Cong. McCollum’s staff to urge increased and timely FY2008 NIH/NEI appropriations, as well as to invite staff to visit. Just two months later, Cong. McCollum was an active participant in the Subcommittee’s hearing with NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni and subsequent Public Witness hearings, which included March 27 testimony by NAEVR’s Dr. Stephen Ryan.

In early August and at her laboratory, Dr. McLoon hosted Joe Carlisle, educating him about her NEI-funded research and introducing him to fellow vision researchers. After the visit, Dr. McLoon commented to NAEVR that, “It is interesting how personalizing those ‘form letter’ emails to Capitol Hill can make a difference in terms of response.”

Dr. Linda McLoon

“It is interesting how personalizing those ‘form letter’ emails to Capitol Hill can make a difference in terms of response.”

Dr. Linda McLoon

Joe Carlisle from the office of Cong. Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Dr. McLoon

Huey Cai, M.D. (Columbia University), Steven Pittler, Ph.D. (University of Alabama at Birmingham), and Cynthia Ricard, Ph.D. (St. Louis University Eye Institute) contact Congress at the ARVO Annual Meeting

Dr. David Hunter with John Phillips in the office of Sen. John Kerry (D-MA)