President’s Message

Since my travel schedule has taken me to Washington, D.C. frequently this year, I have had the opportunity to both advocate and educate on Capitol Hill about the value of vision research within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). I have consistently heard in Hill offices—especially those of key committee leaders—about the quality and credibility of NAEVR’s messages about the value of National Eye Institute (NEI)-funded research. As evidence, one of the stories contained herein describes the Report Language from both the Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations bills, which was adopted verbatim from NAEVR’s submissions.

NAEVR’s messages are further supported by AEVR’s educational briefings, which this quarter focused on the topics of Visual Imaging and Children’s Vision Research. AEVR’s Congressional briefings held so far this year have already drawn more than 200 attendees.

When Congress returns in September, they will have a busy legislative schedule. Although the House has acted on all of its FY2008 appropriations bills, the Senate has only acted on one. Despite both LHHS bills including increases for NIH/NEI, these are not guaranteed, due to the threat of a Presidential veto and a process that could result in an omnibus funding bill or one or more funding resolutions. NAEVR will continue to emphasize the need for both increased and timely appropriations and engage network members as appropriate in reaching out to Congress.

Even though NIH was funded in FY2007 through a Joint Resolution (JR) that maintained NEI appropriations at the FY2006 level of $667 million, the NEI has netted $12.7 million more for vision research. At the June 7 meeting of the National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC), NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving announced that NEI received a total of $4.2 million in NIH Director’s Bridge Awards from the $91 million pool contained in the JR. This is in addition to the $8.5 million already available for NEI programs from the JR, since it directly funded the newly established NIH common fund (which was supported by NAEVR in the NIH Reform Act of 2006), obviating NEI’s contribution.

The $12.7 million NEI programmatic increase, coupled with the $4.8 million awarded to vision researchers in 2007 through the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP), means that the vision community has netted an additional $17.5 million for research in FY2007 over FY2006. This represents a greater than 30-fold return on the community’s $550,000 investment in NAEVR/AEVR this year.

Although this edition resembles a travelogue of images of my activities, I wanted you to see that we are working effectively with both sides of the aisle in both chambers to secure eye and vision research funding for our community from the NIH and other sources. I appreciate the efforts of NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky and Advocacy Manager David Epstein, in consultation with Legislative Counsel John Porter, to fully maximize my time with Members of Congress and their staffs.

Thank you for your support.

Stephen J. Ryan, M.D.
Doheny Eye Institute
NAEVR/AEVR Boards President
sryan@doheny.org

On July 10, Dr. Ryan met with Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), thanking him for his leadership to increase FY2008 NIH funding by $1 billion in the Senate bill.