Legislative Scorecard Issues

NEI Confirms $6.2 Million Reduction in FY2011 Funding

At its June 16 National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC) meeting, NEI confirmed that its Fiscal Year (FY) funding was reduced by $6.2 million to $700.8 million, or about one percent below the FY2010 level of $706.7 million (see funding chart). On April 14—seven months into the fiscal year—Congress passed final FY2011 funding through an eighth and final Continuing Resolution (CR) in which NIH received a 0.8 percent cut in funding in addition to an across-the-board 0.2 percent cut in all defense discretionary spending, as compared to FY2010. NIH was cut by a total of $322 million. Since this was not a “regular order” appropriations bill and required agencies to submit FY2011 spending plans for review, most did not receive confirmation of funding levels until much later.

Due to the series of CRs that funded the government at the FY2010 level throughout the first half of FY2011, NEI, as well as all other NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs), had to limit funding of grant commitments and was prohibited from starting new programs. With the final funding confirmation, NIH has also revised the noncompeting grant inflationary allowance policy to help ICs manage reduced budgets. NEI has stated that, since its number of noncompeting Research Project Grants (RPGs) decreased under the regular cycle, it will be able to maintain relatively the same total number of RPGs and a success rate above the NIH average for FY2011.

Sebelius, Collins Testify About FY2012 Budget

On March 11 and 30, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius testified about the President’s FY2012 proposed budget (released on February 14) before the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittees of the House and Senate, respectively. Secretary Sebelius echoed the President’s comments about the importance of innovation, generally, and NIH, specifically, in justifying the administration’s proposed $745 million, or 2.4 percent increase over FY2010, for NIH.

At the Senate hearing, Senate Ranking Member Richard Shelby (R-AL) cautioned against across-the-board cuts and urged Congress to sustain programs that are effective, where he cited NIH as “one of the most results-driven aspects of our entire federal budget” and stressed that its programs “consistently meet their performance and outcomes measures, as well as achieve their overall mission.” Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) noted that a government shutdown, NIH cuts, or delayed appropriations, individually or in combination, will have far-reaching consequences, especially for academic Institutions across the country which receive funding.

On May 11, NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins testified before the Senate Subcommittee, where he reported examples of cost-savings resulting from NIH-driven improvements in health, as well as studies showing the impact of medical research on jobs and the economy. He and several Subcommittee members cited the just-released United for Medical Research (UMR) study entitled An Economic Engine: NIH Research, Employment, and the Future of the Medical Innovation Sector which reported that NIH directly and indirectly supported nearly 488,000 jobs and produced $68 billion in new economic activity in 2010 alone.

NAEVR Commends Shelby, Cites Comments in Testimony

On April 8, NAEVR and the EyeSight Foundation of Alabama delivered letters to Senator Shelby commending him for his comments about the importance of investing in the NIH. His comments and those of Senator Mikulski about the implications of delayed funding, formed the basis of NAEVR’s written testimony submitted on April 7 and May 12 to the hearing files of the House and Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittees, respectively, regarding FY2012 NIH appropriations. While acknowledging President Obama’s proposed $745 million, or 2.4 percent increase for the NIH overall as compared to FY2010, NAEVR requested that Congress increase NEI funding above the 1.8 percent proposed by the administration, stressing the vision impairment and eye disease challenges that NEI faces during the Decade of Vision 2010-2020.

NAEVR’s James Jorkasy (left) and Torrey DeKeyser, Executive Director of the EyeSight Foundation of Alabama (right), present Senate LHHS Subcommittee Majority Clerk Laura Friedel with the letter to Ranking Member Senator Shelby

Senators Urge Bipartisan Support for NIH

Senators Robert Casey (D-PA) and Richard Burr (R-NC) led a June 10 letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee and LHHS Subcommittee leadership in support of NIH funding in FY2012 appropriations. The letter, which was signed by a bipartisan group of 41 Senators, highlights NIH as “our best hope” for treating or curing debilitating disease. It also states that investments in NIH have “yielded an unprecedented number of scientific advances that have improved health outcomes and contributed significantly to the nation’s economic growth,” and that it is “essential to continue support for medical research.”