President’s Message

NAEVR Advocates Early in an Anticipated Tough Appropriations Year

I recently enjoyed a dinner in Washington, D.C. with NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky and Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Executive Director Joanne Angle. Although stories of the recent record snowfall dominated the conversation, we reviewed first-quarter advocacy activities and the legislative environment in which they are being conducted.

Despite the historic Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 funding of $230 million for vision research from “regular” and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) appropriations and defense funding, NAEVR has been engaged in Capitol Hill advocacy since the very first week of the year to maintain that momentum. NAEVR met with Hill champions for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding to test messages about the need to fund NIH at $35 billion in FY2011–essentially the net level of funding in FY2009 and 2010 from “regular” and ARRA appropriations—to continue the stream of breakthroughs and fully leverage the significant ARRA investment.

NAEVR also met with its defense vision champions to test messages about the need to fund the dedicated Peer Reviewed Medical Research-Vision (PRMR-Vision) line at $10 million in defense appropriations. Since this dedicated line was just established in FY2009, NAEVR also educated staff in the offices of House and Senate defense appropriators that it is the only dedicated funding source for extramural vision research into immediate battlefield needs that is not currently being conducted by the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). NAEVR member Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) has used its impressive influence to echo and amplify that message, especially garnering support from a wide range of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), and I want to express my deepest appreciation to them for their assistance and dedication.

Our work is cut out for us, so I appreciate the commitments that members have made to support the Alliances in 2010.

NAEVR anticipates a very tough appropriations year due to Congressional concern about spending. As a result, NAEVR/AEVR followed these initial visits with a whirlwind of high-profile Capitol Hill events featured herein, ensuring that our issues remain in the spotlight. One overriding theme prevailed in all events—that, in 2009 through H. Res. 366 and S. Res. 209, Congress recognized the 40th anniversary of the NEI and designated 2010-2020 as the Decade of Vision. During this timeframe, vision research must be adequately funded, since investigators will be challenged to address the impact of aging eye disease, the disproportionate incidence of eye disease in minority populations, the visual implications of other chronic diseases, and the unprecedented impact of devastating eye injuries being incurred in Iraq and Afghanistan.

ARVO’s late January Advocacy Day set the tone, enabling both domestic and international researchers to discuss the broad reach of the U.S. biomedical research enterprise and why “going backwards” is not an option. In mid-February, and in its first defense vision Congressional briefing, AEVR addressed the potential for corneal wound sealing on the battlefield.

In early March, AEVR joined with the entire vision community in recognizing the first-ever World Glaucoma Week in a Congressional briefing. AEVR’s efforts were amplified that same day when member Prevent Blindness America (PBA) held its Patient Advocacy Day and coordinated a Congressional Vision Caucus reception that evening. Jim Jorkasky has told me that our work is cut out for us, so I appreciate the commitments that members have made to support the Alliances in 2010. I especially want to thank those network members who highlighted our 2009 accomplishments in their late 2009 and early 2010 communications. This not only serves to educate broadly on the value of supporting our work, but emphasizes that we all have a stake in the future funding for and success of vision research.

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

Our work is cut out for us, so I appreciate the commitments that members have made to support the Alliances in 2010. Our work is cut out for us, so I appreciate the commitments that members have made to support the Alliances in 2010.