As NAEVR and AEVR conclude their 20th anniversary, I am struck by the amount of change that has occurred within the Alliances since we began the celebration a year ago. Sadly, Dr. Ron Smith passed away recently. Ron was a founding member of the Alliances’ Boards, as well as an active member of ARVO and the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Ron was a humble man who let his intellect, compassion, and dedication to the vision community serve as his voice. The silence will be deafening for those of us who cherished our time with him.

Two other long-time Board members concluded their service late last year—Sally Atherton, Ph.D., who during her tenure served as both ARVO Executive Vice President and ARVO Executive Director, and Nobel laureate Torsten Weisel, M.D. (President Emeritus, The Rockefeller University). We were fortunate to benefit from their knowledge and dedication, and thank them for their service. The Alliances’ Vice President Bart Mondino, M.D. (Jules Stein Eye Institute/UCLA) is chairing the Nominating Committee’s efforts to identify candidates to serve in these Director seats, as well as for two additional seats created by a bylaws change adopted by each organization to increase Board size to 15.

The Alliances’ Strategic Assessment and Plan, conducted in 2013, made that recommendation in addition to others regarding how the Alliances can strengthen their advocacy and educational activities, communicate with their various constituents, and ensure adequate resources for programs. The Boards will be engaged in implementation of the recommendations throughout this year, and I will report those to you.

Regarding change, we are already seeing it on Capitol Hill. Two long-time champions for NEI- and DOD-funded research featured within the Report—Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Cong. Jim Moran (D-Va)—have announced their retirement, effective the end of this session of Congress. Although NAEVR is engaging other Members as champions, the retirement of these two leaders for biomedical research, let alone vision research, is a tremendous loss, especially as Congress grapples with balancing funding priorities in a challenging fiscal environment.

I appreciate the time that Cong. Moran spent with AEVR at its 20th Anniversary Congressional Reception, as well as that of Cong. Gene Green (D-Tx), a co-Chair of the Congressional Vision Caucus, Cong. Howard Coble (R-Nc), who has also announced his retirement, and Cong. Richard Nolan (D-Mn). NEI Director Paul Sieving, M.D., Ph.D. spoke about NEI breakthroughs and offered insights into the potential of the primary Audacious Goal of Regenerating Neurons and Neuronal Connections in the Eye and Visual System to transform medicine, as well as the lives of millions of individuals with eye disease. I encourage you to read his remarks, which are posted at www.eyeresearch.org.

Unfortunately, NEI’s purchasing power has decreased by 25 percent since Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, so NAEVR will continue to lead the charge for adequate NEI funding in FY2015 appropriations.

I wish to thank the vision community organizations that have committed time and resources to the Alliances in 2014. Feel free to email me with any comments or observations.

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This edition of the Report is dedicated to Dr. Ron Smith, Medical Director of the Doheny Eye Institute and founding NAEVR/AEVR Board member, who passed away on March 17.

Ronald Smith, M.D.
1942-2014

Dr. McDonnell with Cong. Jim Moran (D-VA), a champion for vision research, at AEVR’s 20th Anniversary Reception

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
NAEVR Defense Vision Funding Opportunities Session at ARVO AM
Monday May 5, 2014, from 7:30 – 8:30 am
Orange County Convention Center, Room 329
DOD/TATRC Representatives and VTRP-funded vision researchers will offer advice on how to be responsive to DOD funding opportunities.
RSVP to NAEVR’s David Epstein at depstein@eyeresearch.org