NEI 50th Anniversary

On March 21 and despite the inclement weather that closed the federal government, more than 125 attendees — including Members of Congress and their staff, NIH/NEI employees, and members of the vision community — participated in a Congressional Reception recognizing the 50th Anniversary of NEI’s creation by Congress, with President Lyndon Johnson signing legislation on August 16, 1968. Hosted by Cong. Pete Sessions (R-TX), the program featured comments by NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, NEI Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD, and RPB President Brian Hofland, PhD. Cong. Sessions awarded the Inspirational Vision Research Award to Gordon Legge, PhD, the Distinguished McKnight University Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of Minnesota, for his work in low vision.

“I proposed this Inspirational Vision Research Award to recognize the remarkable work in support of NEI’s mission. I am proud to present it to Professor Legge, since his work embodies the translation of basic research on visual perception and cognition into useful applications to improve the lives of people with low vision and blindness.”
— Cong. Sessions

“I attended NEI’s 25th Anniversary event when I began leading the National Human Genome Research Institute at NIH. Here we are now celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Due to the architecture, accessibility, and elegance of the eye, vision research has always been a few steps ahead in biomedical research. Understanding the genetic basis of eye diseases has led the way for understanding the genetic basis of many common diseases.”
— Dr. Collins

“Today, NEI is at the forefront of regenerative medicine. The Audacious Goals Initiative launched in 2013 has the goal of restoring vision. The AGI funds major research consortia that are developing new ways to image the visual system. We can now look at individual nerve cells in the eyes of patients and learn quite directly whether new treatments are successful.”
— Dr. Sieving

“RPB and NEI have always been connected. Since RPB’s creation in 1960, Founder Jules Stein, MD and President David Weeks both felt passionately that the federal government needed to focus more on vision research. They began a robust campaign that included Congressional testimony in favor of legislation to create a separate National Eye Institute. After legislation passed, they also led efforts to ensure that President Johnson signed it.”
— Dr. Hofland

Beginning with a March 22 Immunology Symposium, NEI will feature other vision-related topics in NIH campus-based Symposia through the year.