ADVOCACY

ARVO Urges Congress to Avoid ANY Funding Cuts

On February 7, members of ARVO’s Annual Meeting Program Committee participated in a National Day of Advocacy in which education, health, and medical research advocates urged Congress to avoid the looming sequester. In 40 meetings during this NAEVR-hosted event, the 13 domestic and 5 international ARVO advocates focused on the impact of the sequester on vision research funding, emphasizing that a 5.1 percent cut to NEI’s FY2012 $703 million funding would result in a loss of $36 million, or potentially 90 new research grants—any one of which has the promise to save or restore vision. They also described their research and the impact of potential cuts—from the sequester, flat funding, or reduced appropriations—as well as the effect of delayed appropriations on their research’s momentum and ability to hire and retain trained staff.

The international ARVO advocates provided global perspectives on the far-reaching impact of the U.S. biomedical enterprise, in terms of research collaborations and training opportunities. Julie Sanderson, Ph.D. (University of East Anglia, United Kingdom), who accompanied Robert Zawadzki, Ph.D. (University of California at Davis), informed the California delegation offices that the sequester would “have a global impact on research and jeopardize the United States’ leadership, as well as its ability to compete internationally.” Dr. Zawadzki, who is originally from Poland, and Ales Cvekl, M.D. (Albert Einstein College of Medicine), who is originally from the Czech Republic, provided both domestic and international perspectives in their visits.

ARVO Executive Director Sally Atherton, Ph.D., and Executive Vice President Craig Crosson, Ph.D. (Medical University of South Carolina) participated, meeting in offices of their respective Members of Congress as well as with staff of key Committees, including the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee. Dr. Atherton, who cautioned that the looming cuts “could result in the loss of an entire generation of biomedical researchers,” reminded the Maryland delegation that ARVO is a significant employer in the state with a large international membership and offered to serve as a reference for vision issues due to the office’s close proximity to Capitol Hill. Dr. Atherton was joined by Ava Bittner, O.D., Ph.D. (Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University), a young investigator who has been funded by an NEI training grant, who expressed concern about her future stating, “I’ve already made a significant commitment to get my advanced degrees, but I want to ensure that there is adequate future funding for my research.”

Dr. Crosson, who was accompanied by international advocate Claudio Bucolo, Ph.D. (University of Catania, Italy) emphasized the sequester’s “cascading impact,” that is, its effect on biomedical research as well as every aspect of patient care.

While the ARVO advocates were on Capitol Hill, United for Medical Research released an updated report on the sequester’s impact on the nation’s life sciences sector, estimating that it would result in the loss of 20,555 jobs and $3 billion in economic output.