PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

It’s All About That (Discretionary) Base!

NAEVR’s advocacy messaging in the first quarter of 2016 and the beginning of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 appropriations cycle was very different than in past years and included:

- Thanking Congress for the FY2016 funding increases, including $2 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and $51 million for the National Eye Institute (NEI) — the latter after four years is now funded at a level greater than that in pre-sequester FY2012, albeit by a modest 0.8 percent.

- Supporting efforts by bipartisan Members in both chambers to ensure that the FY2016 funding increases begin a pattern of future sustained and predictable increases reflecting real growth above biomedical inflation.

- Joining bipartisan Members in both chambers in expressing concern about the President’s FY2017 budget request and its use of mandatory funding to supplant $1 billion of NIH discretionary funding, which also decreases NEI’s discretionary base. Mandatory funding is politically sensitive, outside the jurisdiction of the appropriators, and requires pay-fors.

As described within, this year’s recently-held appropriations hearings by the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittees of the House

Congress must balance strong bipartisan support for NIH discretionary funding base increases against tight budget caps, which could mean cuts to other popular LHHS programs.

and Senate with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell and NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D. (latter in the House to-date) regarding the President’s request have truly been “All about that base”—NIH discretionary, that is.

This will require appropriators to make some difficult decisions even if Congress adheres to the FY2017 budget framework set forth in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 passed last October, which is not guaranteed. They must balance strong bipartisan support for NIH discretionary funding base increases against tight budget caps, which could mean cuts to other popular LHHS programs. And with their distaste for mandatory funding that supplants the NIH discretionary base rather than supplementing it, they will need to find a “path forward” to reach a goal of continued real growth above biomedical inflation. The House has already supported mandatory funding for specific NIH programs in the 21st Century Cures Act it passed in 2015 (supported by NAEVR), and as recently as the March 3 Senate LHHS hearing, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) stated that, perhaps, mandatory funding could be used as “surge” funding for new NIH initiatives, within a set timeframe with a specified amount.

Although Congress still intends to complete the appropriations process in regular order, pundits are already predicting an inevitable Continuing Resolution and completion of FY2017 appropriations post-election. Regardless, NAEVR will continue full-bore with its advocacy and AEVR with its education. I want to thank all of the researchers who have already assisted this quarter, and we have acknowledged them in the stories and images contained within this Report.

ARVO’s February 12 Advocacy Day engaged domestic and international research advocates from all stages of their careers, including Emerging Vision Scientists who are so vital to the future of vision research. ARVO Board President John Clark, Ph.D. (University of Washington) made the long flight from Seattle to Washington, D.C. twice this quarter, participating in the ARVO Advocacy Day regarding NIH/NEI funding, then on March 16-17 with Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) in support of the vision community’s request for $15 million funding for the Peer Reviewed Vision Research Program (VRP) to address traumatic eye injuries. I especially want to thank John for his support and commitment of time.

I want to conclude by thanking all of the organizations that have committed and paid NAEVR dues and AEVR contributions in 2016. The Alliances are fully funded and have many other activities planned for this year, including a second annual Emerging Vision Scientists Day on Capitol Hill, set for September 14-15 and made possible by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB). Stay tuned for additional details!

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Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO), Chairman of the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee, with Rigmor Baraas, Ph.D. (University College of Southeast Norway) and Uday Kompella, Ph.D. (University of Colorado). During the February 12 ARVO Advocacy Day, these researchers met Chairman Blunt in a hallway and thanked him for championing the $2 billion FY2016 NIH funding increase. He responded that he would like to continue a pattern of real growth plus biomedical inflation for NIH.

NAEVR at the 2016 ARVO Annual Meeting

Saturday, April 30

ARVO’s Vision and Traumatic Brain Injury: The Outlook for Therapeutics Session
10:00 am – 1:00 pm in Skagit 4/5,
Washington State Convention Center

Sunday, May 1 – Wednesday, May 4

NAEVR Central
9:00 am – 4:00 pm Daily, Skybridge,
Washington State Convention Center

Monday, May 2

NAEVR’s Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities Session
7:30 am – 8:30 am in Room 3AB,
Washington State Convention Center