PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Thanking and Developing our Champions for Vision

Much has happened since I last wrote to you in October 2018, including the November election that resulted in new House Democratic leadership and a significant change in Congress, especially new House Members. Before year’s end, NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky already had plans in place for developing new champions for vision research in the 116th Congress, First Session. But we still had some important work to do—acknowledge Members who had served as our past champions.

I was fortunate to have joined Prevent Blindness last July in Washington, D.C. at the Focus on Eye Health National Summit in recognizing retiring Congressional Vision Caucus co-chairs Gene Green (D-TX) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) for their service. In mid-December and before a roaring fire in the House Rules Committee offices in the Capitol, I was pleased to present a NAEVR plaque of appreciation to retiring Member Pete Sessions (R-TX). In his usual gracious manner, Cong. Sessions then engaged National Eye Institute (NEI) Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD and the dozen participating vision community representatives in a “fireside chat” about public and private sector initiatives to accelerate translation of research into therapies for patients. It truly was an amazing discussion about the future in such an historic location.

As noted within, we are facing a third year of challenges with the President’s proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 federal budget which once again would drastically cut major health programs, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and NEI, which are funded through nondefense discretionary (NDD) spending. As expected, NAEVR expressed concern about the proposal, noting that “We must maintain the forward momentum that Congress has driven over the past four years” of NIH and NEI funding, with increases of $9 billion and $120 million, respectively, from FY2016 through 2019.

Congress will once again have an opportunity to consider the President’s proposed cuts, which it rejected along with policy and structural changes the past two years. Critical in this regard are the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittees of the House and Senate. We welcome Cong. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) as the House Subcommittee Chair, and recognize the pivotal role that current Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) played as prior Chair in supporting the past four years of funding increases. We also look forward to working with Senate Chair Roy Blunt (R-MO), who along with Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) not only led bipartisan efforts to increase NIH funding, but also emphasized inflationary increases for the Institutes and Centers (ICs).

NAEVR has met with staff of all Subcommittee members and in some cases has been accompanied by researchers, including those participating in the February 8 ARVO Annual Meeting Planning Committee Advocacy Day. In requesting FY2020 funding increases—$2.5 billion for NIH and $53 million for NEI—the advocates acknowledged that Congress must first pass a bipartisan budget deal to raise the FY2020 and 2021 Budget Control Act caps, especially for critical NDD programs, such as medical research.

I wish to thank all members who have committed support for 2019, making the Alliances’ advocacy and educational goals possible.

Peter J. McDonnell, MD
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On December 12, 2018, NEI Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD, left, joins while Dr. McDonnell presents a NAEVR plaque to Cong. Pete Sessions (R-TX), center, who retired from Congress. Recognizing his 22 years of service in Congress—most recently as Rules Committee Chair—Dr. McDonnell called Cong. Sessions the “ultimate Friend of the NEI” for his past support for:

• Submitting Report Language that supported NEI and created the 3D Retina Organoid Challenge;

• Leading recognition of NEI’s 50th anniversary in 2018; and

• Serving as an initial co-sponsor of HR 6421, the Faster Cures and Treatment for Eye Diseases Act [Eye Bond legislation].

A number of DC-based vision organization representatives attended the event and joined Cong. Sessions in a 45-minute discussion about ways to accelerate translation of vision research into therapies for patients.

“We are facing a third year of challenges with the President’s proposed FY2020 federal budget.” – Dr. McDonnell

On December 12, 2018, NEI Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD, left, joins while Dr. McDonnell presents a NAEVR plaque to Cong. Pete Sessions (R-TX), center, who retired from Congress. Recognizing his 22 years of service in Congress—most recently as Rules Committee Chair—Dr. McDonnell called Cong. Sessions the “ultimate Friend of the NEI” for his past support for:

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NAEVR Events: NAEVR At The 2019 ARVO Annual Meeting
Sunday, April 28 – Wednesday, May 1
ARVO Central, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Daily, Vancouver Convention Center

Monday, April 29
NAEVR’s Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities Session
7:00 am – 8:00 am, Room 109/110, Vancouver Convention Center West

AEVR Events: Congressional Briefings
Wednesday, May 15
NEI’s DRCR Network: Optimizing Treatments for Diabetic Eye Disease
12 Noon – 1:15 pm, Room 2044, Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, July 10
Dry Eye Awareness Month Congressional Briefing and Screening
11:30 am – 1:30 pm, Room 2043, Rayburn House Office Building