Vision Research Program Funding Scorecard
Since it was created by Congress in FY2009 Defense appropriations by NAEVR advocacy and through FY2019, the Vision Research Program (VRP) has been funded by Congress at $104.5 million and has made 85 awards for a total of $85 million, with FY2018 awards still to be finalized.

FY2020: NAEVR Requesting VRP Funding of $20 Million
NAEVR is requesting FY2020 VRP funding at $20 million—the same level at which it was funded in FY2019 and $5 million greater than each FY2017 and 2018. NAEVR partners with the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), ARVO, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and the American Optometric Association in advocacy activities, supplemented by:

• The FY2020 Independent Budget (IB) requesting VRP funding at $20 million. The IB is a biennial set of recommendations to Congress regarding Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) funding which is developed by Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars and supported by 24 other Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and Military Service Organizations (MSOs), including BVA and NAEVR.

• A January 2019 Military Medicine article that estimates that deployment-related eye injuries and blindness have cost the U.S. $41.5 billion in the 2000-2017 timeframe, with $40.2 billion of that cost reflecting present value of a lifetime of long-term benefits, lost wages, and family care. The article is based on AEVR’s 2018 update of NAEVR’s 2012 Cost of Military Blindness study.

ARVO President/NAEVR Director Dr. Steven Fliesler Advocates for VRP Funding
On February 19, BVA’s Board President Thomas Zampieri, PhD hosted Dr. Fliesler and blinded veteran Steven Baskis in Congressional office visits to advocate for VRP funding. Dr. Fliesler, a VA-funded blast injury researcher with a lab at the Buffalo VA Medical Center (VA Western New York Healthcare System) who also serves as the Research Stakeholder Representative to the VRP Programmatic Committee, and Mr. Baskis, who served as a Security Specialist in Baghdad, Iraq until he was blinded in 2008 by an improvised explosive device, met with the staff from key House Members on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and Armed Services Committee. Afterwards, Dr. Fliesler commented:

“On almost a daily basis, I see veterans who have experienced vision loss, ranging from seniors with age-related eye diseases to young vets, such as Steve Baskis, who have vision loss or impairment due to trauma, including penetrating and non-penetrating eye injuries from blasts or TBI-related disorders. As a research advocate, I was pleased to join with Steve, a patient advocate, and Tom to educate the offices of these key leaders about the importance of VRP funded research to better address these life-changing conditions.”

FY2019 and FY2018: VRP Committee Finalizes FY2018 Awards, Begins FY2019 Planning
On March 26, the VRP Program Committee met to finalize FY2018 awards. In addition to the ten awards selected for funding, the Committee developed a list of alternate projects that could receive awards if additional funds become available. The VRP will now begin the process of negotiating grant contracts with the selected researchers. On March 27, the Committee began its planning for the FY2019 funding cycle, expecting to release a Pre-Announcement in early April, followed by a full Announcement issued in May after the ARVO Annual Meeting.

Visit the Defense-related Vision Research section of NAEVR’s Web site at www.eyeresearch.org for details

Left to right: Blinded veteran Steven Baskis (U.S. Army Private First Class, retired) joined ARVO 2018-2019 President and NAEVR Director Steven J. Fliesler, PhD (SUNY-Buffalo/VA Medical Center-Buffalo) outside the office of Cong Charlie Crist (R-FL), a new member of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee

Colonel Mark Reynolds, Chief of the joint DOD/VA Vision Center of Excellence (VCE) with BVA Board President Tom Zampieri, PhD at the VRP Committee meeting