

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Let's Make A Deal!



Peter McDonnell MD, William Holland Wilmer Professor and Director, Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

In this classic 1960s game show, some contestants would trade a new car for "Curtain Number 3," and often behind that was a broken-down jalopy or some other undesirable gag prize of little value. In this edition of the Report, you will read about NAEVR's advocacy efforts—supported by AEVR's educational efforts—that urge Congress to pass a bipartisan budget deal that raises the nondefense discretionary budget caps and enables the Senate Appropriations Committee-proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) funding bill's \$2 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Without

A Congressional bipartisan budget deal that raises the nondefense discretionary budget caps enables the \$2 billion NIH increase, as proposed for FY2018 by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

this action, Congress cannot finalize the FY2018 appropriations bills as written, since they exceed Budget Control Act caps, and we could potentially end up with a full-year Continuing Resolution (CR). This would be the equivalent of the gag prize behind the curtain, as a full-year CR would essentially be a cut, due to an across-the-board reduction to meet FY2018 budget caps and the impact of inflation.

Although Congress has not yet taken visible steps to initiate a budget deal, Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle are voicing the necessity for it, especially due to numerous legislative initiatives that require funding, including additional supplemental emergency funding for the recent natural disasters. As foreseen, a budget deal—ideally spanning two fiscal years—would result in Congress developing an FY2018 "Omnibus" spending bill that would include funding for these initiatives. Since the current CR that funds the government and raises the debt limit expires on December 8, Congress would likely need to pass another short-term CR and negotiate a deal, hopefully before year-end. But as we saw with FY2017 appropriations, the process can linger on into the next year—especially with the new Administration's priorities—creating budget uncertainty for government entities such as the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the vision research community it supports.

And, as I write this, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is preparing the President's FY2019 proposed budget, which may include NIH/NEI funding, policy, and structure challenges as did the FY2018 proposal. Clearly, the Alliances will remain as active as ever to ensure the greatest possible funding for eye and vision research from various federal sources.

In mid-September, I was proud to host the evening Congressional Poster Session associated with AEVR's *Third Annual Emerging Vision Scientists (EVS) Day on Capitol Hill* at which NEI Deputy Director Belinda Seto, PhD spoke about the Institute's commitment to early-stage investigators. The event, funded by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness, drew a packed room of Members and staff interested in breakthrough research being conducted by these pre-R01 researchers. The 18 EVSs reflected the most diverse group ever along just about every metric, including the breadth of vision research. The EVSs represented many "heartland" Departments of Ophthalmology and Schools/Colleges of Optometry, which was valuable in Congressional delegation visits the next day with key Republican leaders from those states, as well as key Democrats. As in past years, several members made the time to personally visit with these early-stage investigators and hear their funding and career concerns.

I wish to thank all of the organizations that have supported the Alliances in 2017 not only with dues and contributions, but with their time and resources to assist in advocacy and education. NAEVR has held a record number of multi-researcher Advocacy Days, while AEVR has held the largest number of Congressional Briefings ever, including the greatly-expanded *Dry Eye Awareness Month* this past July (detailed in the Spring/Summer Report) and the upcoming Keratoconus Congressional Briefing in November (see box below)—a first-time event.

As previously noted, 2018 will likely be another tough year on Capitol Hill, even with a budget deal, due to shifting priorities and ongoing and as-yet identified legislative needs. But it will also be a time to celebrate NEI's 50th anniversary, as well as AEVR's 25th anniversary as "The Friends of the NEI." AEVR is already planning a number of high-profile events that will draw Hill, media, and public attention to the issue of vision and vision loss. The Board-approved dues increase for each 2017 and 2018, coming after nearly ten years of no increases, have been critical in making the Alliances stronger than ever and in engaging more of the vision community than ever.

I'll make you a deal. When the 2018 renewal issues in early December, your financial support will ensure that the Alliances continue to be prepared to deal with potential vision research funding, structure, and policy challenges that have never been greater. And we will call upon you to add your voices to ensure that NEI continues to fund vision research for another 50 years, and that the Alliances have another 25 years of advocacy and education.

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Left to right: Dr. McDonnell listens as NEI Deputy Director Belinda Seto, PhD speaks about NEI's commitment to early-stage investigators at the September 13 evening Congressional Poster Session as part of the *Third Annual EVS Day on Capitol Hill*



NAEVR's advocacy outreach included Executive Director James Jorkasky (far right) speaking at the Southeastern Research Conference in Nashville, Tennessee in early October. From left, he is joined by representatives of the three sponsoring departments: Paul Sternberg, Jr, MD (Vanderbilt Eye Institute/Vanderbilt University), Chris Girkin, MD, MSPH (Department of Ophthalmology/University of Alabama at Birmingham), and Jeff Boatright, PhD (Emory Eye Center/Emory University). Together, their programs in vision research account for nearly \$29 million in NEI grant funding.

Upcoming Events:

November 7
AEVR Congressional Briefing
Spearheading Keratoconus Research: A Quest for Novel Treatments
Recognizing National Keratoconus Day 2017 (November 10)
12 Noon-1:15 pm, House Rayburn 2075

December 7
ARVO Congressional Briefing
Optical Coherence Tomography: Healthcare Savings Through Research
12 Noon - 1:00 pm House Rayburn 2045
(AEVR serving as Co-sponsor)

And in 2018...NEI's 50th Anniversary, AEVR's 25th Anniversary!