

Contributor Report

President's Message

NAEVR Nets \$12 Million for Vision Research in FY2007 By Focusing its Message on Appropriators' Priorities

In late March, I joined Dr. Karla Zadnik (Ohio State University) in testifying before the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, urging an increase in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Eye Institute (NEI) funding of \$31 billion and \$711 million, respectively (see story inside). I also had the chance to join NAEVR Executive Director Jim Jorkasky and Advocacy Manager David Epstein in Capitol Hill visits with both existing and new champions for increased NIH/NEI funding and defense-related vision research. As you can see from stories featured herein, NAEVR has been a constant presence on Capitol Hill this first quarter with the 110th Congress, sharing a consistent message about the need for increased and timely NIH/NEI appropriations.

This tenacity has paid off, as our community will net an additional \$12 million for vision research in FY2007—\$8.5 million more “programmable” dollars at NEI, and \$3.5 million of FY2006 Department of Defense (DOD) Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) awards distributed in FY2007 to five vision researchers.

The latter amount is notable since the FY2006 funding cycle was the first in which eye and vision research was eligible for PRMRP funding—thanks to the advocacy efforts of NAEVR Legislative Counsel John Porter—and it represents ten percent of all awards granted. Although advocacy for NEI funding will always be NAEVR's first priority as the “Friends of the NEI”, defense and veterans-related vision research is increasingly important. These funding sources are not mutually exclusive, as several Members asked witnesses at the recent House and Senate NIH appropriations hearings about the applicability of NIH-funded research to injuries suffered by soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. In that regard, the vision community has a compelling story to tell.

This community's investment in NAEVR and AEVR, at about \$550,000 this year, has netted a \$12 million increase in vision research funding—a greater than 20-fold return.

Beyond those dramatic numbers, NAEVR's leadership on the NIH reauthorization issue last year has not only resulted in maintenance of the NEI budget line item, but has yielded a greater Congressional awareness of the value of vision research. I can assure you from my own Congressional visits that NAEVR's endorsement of the NIH reauthorization legislation last year has given us standing in requesting increased NEI funding in the offices of Members from both parties, from moderate to conservative.



Vision community representatives Dr. Ryan and Dr. Karla Zadnik (Ohio State University School of Optometry) at the March 27 House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Public Witness hearing

I sense a momentum from Congressional leaders for an NIH increase in “real” dollars this funding cycle, driven primarily by the excellent job NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni has done in characterizing the value of NIH research. NAEVR will continue to emphasize NEI's accomplishments in terms of Dr. Zerhouni's priorities in its direct advocacy and in its engagement of all NAEVR network members throughout this budget and appropriations cycle. As always, thank you for your support and commitment.

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