

Vision Community Welcomes 110th Congress, Urges Increased and Timely FY2008 Appropriations

On January 31, NAEVR hosted more than 150 Members of Congress and their staffs in a welcome reception for the 110th Congress. Cong. James Walsh (R-NY), a co-host for the event (along with Cong. Anna G. Eshoo, D-CA), provided a formal welcome, followed by brief comments from Dr. Neil Bressler (Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine).

Cong. Walsh, who currently serves as the Ranking Member of the House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee, with funding jurisdiction over the NIH/NEI, spoke passionately about vision research. As the former Chair of the House Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee in the 109th Congress, he championed eye and vision research's eligibility for peer-reviewed research funding within the DOD's Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (see previous story).

"I was fortunate to be familiar with the significant technological breakthroughs in eye and vision research at the State University of New York (SUNY) Upstate Medical University/Syracuse College of Medicine, under the direction of Ophthalmology Department Chair Dr. John Hoepner. After getting to know a constituent who suffered serious eye injury in Iraq, I wanted to ensure the very best eye care that medical research can provide to those who are asked to put themselves in harm's way."

Dr. Bressler spoke about the value of vision research, reporting that 200,000 Americans each year are diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of vision loss that primarily affects seniors. Due to NEI-funded research into factors that inhibit the new blood vessel growth that destroys the central vision of individuals with AMD, Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved drugs are now available that could prevent significant vision loss in 95 percent of all people affected with this condition. He added that researchers within the NEI-funded Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research Network are hopeful that these same drugs will also stop vision loss associated with diabetic retinopathy, another potentially blinding disorder that affects individuals who have diabetes.

Dr. Bressler concluded by urging Members and their staffs to not only increase FY2008 NIH/NEI funding, but to ensure the timeliness of the appropriations process such that the continuity of vision research is not jeopardized by delays in funding awards from the NEI. NAEVR's James Jorkasky reminded attendees that the vision research community endorsed the *NIH Reform Act of 2006* and anticipated that the NEI could compete effectively for dollars in the newly established common fund for trans-Institute research, since it has a strong history of collaborations with other Institutes.



Left to right Co-host Cong. James Walsh (R-NY) and NAEVR's James Jorkasky. Earlier in the day, Walsh voted to increase NIH funding in the year-long FY2007 funding Joint Resolution.



Left to right Bill Schmidt (Foundation Fighting Blindness), Cathy Cohen (American Academy of Ophthalmology) and Cong. Pete Sessions (R-TX), a champion for vision research.



Left Dr. Neil Bressler, who spoke about the value of NEI-sponsored research.

Above Dr. Bressler with Cong. Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD).

NAEVR was pleased to add the following new contributors to the list of Alliance members featured at the Welcome Reception:

**Association of Vision Science Librarians
Blinded Veterans Association
Vision Council of America**

Cong. Walsh's dialogue with the medical research advocacy community continued with a March 1 breakfast attended by NAEVR and its Legislative Counsel John Porter.

Right Cong. Walsh and John Porter

