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Vision Research Community Welcomes 110th Congress Urging an Increase In and Timeliness of NIH/NEI Appropriations

On January 31, NAEVR, on behalf of the community of support for eye and vision research, 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 presented by Dr. Neil Bressler (Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine).

Cong. Walsh, who currently serves as the Ranking Member of the House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Educa-



Left to right Co-Host Cong. James Walsh (R-NY) and NAEVR's James Jorkasky. Earlier in the day, Walsh voted to increase funding for the NIH and NEI as part of the Joint Resolution which will fund most government programs for Fiscal Year 2007, and at the reception he vowed to champion vision research.



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tion (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, with funding jurisdiction over the National Institutes of Health (NIH)/National Eye Institute (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 Department of Defense's (DOD) Congressionally-directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP). "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."



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

Dr. Bressler, an NEI-funded investigator, spoke about the value of vision research. He reported 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



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

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

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 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 Executive Director James Jorkasky concluded by reminding attendees that the vision research community endorsed the *National Institutes of Health Reform Act of 2006*, which was passed by Congress with strong bipartisan support in December 2006, and looks forward to the implementation of that act with respect to the upcoming appropriations process. "NAEVR urges appropriators to support Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 NIH funding of \$31 billion and NEI funding of \$711 million, which reflects a 6.7 percent increase over FY2007," stated Jorkasky, who added that he anticipated that the NEI would compete effectively for dollars within the newly established "common fund" for trans-Institute research, since it has a strong history of collaborations with other Institutes.