

# Contributor Report

## Dr. Zerhouni Emphasizes Value from NIH Budget Doubling at House Hearing

On April 6, while the House was engaged in budget negotiations, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH) presided over a hearing featuring NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni. In hard-hitting written and verbal testimony, Dr. Zerhouni quantified the benefits derived from the doubling of the NIH budget from FY1998-2003, in terms of treatments and therapies that have emerged to reduce or prevent risk and save and enhance lives, as well as the impact on local economies in terms of jobs created from NIH funding and the associated biomedical and biotech industries.

In describing the budget doubling's transformation of NIH research into that which is more predictive, preemptive and personalized, he cited three vision examples: discovery of the gene strongly associated with age-related macular degeneration (AMD); preventive effect of antioxidant vitamins in reducing progression to advanced AMD; and savings to the healthcare system from

***"If you look at what we've done during the doubling, not only do you have results, you have a promise."*** —Dr. Zerhouni (pictured below)

the use of laser photocoagulation in diabetic retinopathy (estimated by NEI at \$1.6 billion per year). Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), further emphasized the importance of the AMD gene discovery as a direct outcome of the past investment in the HapMap Project to map the human genome.

Ranking Democrat David Obey (D-WI) strongly criticized the President's FY2007 flat-funded budget for NIH, noting that it would result in 650 fewer grants than in FY2006 and further reduce NIH's purchasing power, which will have declined by 11 percent since 2003. He joined his Democratic colleagues in urging support for the addition of \$7 billion for health and education programs in the House Budget Resolution.

NAEVR, ARVO and the American Optometric Association submitted written

testimony urging increased NIH/NEI funding, which focused on "missed opportunities" to follow up on the AMD/Diabetic Retinopathy research due to the proposed cut to the NEI budget. NAEVR reiterated its request of \$711 million as that necessary for the NEI to fully advance the breakthroughs emerging from its basic and clinical research.

At press time, the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee is scheduled to hold its hearing with Dr. Zerhouni on May 19. Dr. Ryan has been invited by Sen. Specter to participate in a panel that identifies potential "missed opportunities" within individual Institutes due to proposed FY2007 funding.

NIH, NEI and NAEVR written testimonies are at [www.eyeresearch.org](http://www.eyeresearch.org)

