

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Anticipating Change



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By the time you receive this edition of the Report—which is now a self-mailer—the elections will have been held and transition activities will be in full swing for a new Administration, including President and Department/Agency heads, and the 115th Congress, First Session. The Alliances have been building a solid foundation in anticipation of that change.

In its post-election lame-duck session, the 114th Congress still has to act on finalizing Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 appropriations, as the current Continuing Resolution (CR) expires on December 9. Anything can happen, ranging from an omnibus bill that includes a National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding increase—proposed by the Senate Appropriations Committee at \$2 billion—to a full-year CR with no funding increase, unless NIH is designated as an anomaly. When the 115th Congress convenes in January, it will face the specter of FY2018 appropriations which, barring legislative action, must comply with Budget Control Act sequestration.

Most of this edition details NAEVR advocacy and AEVR education regarding the value of federal funding at the NIH and National Eye Institute (NEI). Major September events included the Second Annual *Emerging Vision Scientists (EVS) Day* on Capitol Hill and the *Rally for Medical Research Advocacy Day*. At the EVS event funded by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness, NEI Director Paul Sieving, M.D., Ph.D. and I welcomed 22 early-stage investigators from across the nation in AEVR's evening Congressional Reception at which they exhibited posters of their breakthrough research, then visited Congressional delegation offices the next day under the auspices of NAEVR to discuss their plight as an early-stage investigator. At the *Rally Advocacy Day*, both NAEVR and ARVO hosted researchers who called upon Congress to pass a short-term CR and then finalize FY2017 appropriations with the \$2 billion NIH increase.

Alliance activities have been bolstered by the release of two important documents:

- The August 2016 *JAMA Ophthalmology* Online First article based on results from AEVR's 2014 survey entitled *The Public's Attitudes about the Health and Economic Impact of Vision Loss and Eye Disease*—commissioned by Research!America and conducted by Zogby Analytics through a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness. This publication, the most accessed of that edition, reported that Americans across all racial and ethnic lines rate losing vision as potentially having the greatest impact on their day-to-day life.
- The September 15 release of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM, formerly the Institute of Medicine, IOM) report entitled *Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow*. Released while NAEVR was hosting EVS Congressional delegation visits, the report makes nine recommendations, including calling on the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state and local health departments, the vision community, and stakeholders to raise national awareness and take action toward reducing the burden of vision impairment and eye disease.

NAEVR was one of nine organizations sponsoring the report (including CDC and NEI), and was pleased that the Executive Summary acknowledged the *JAMA Ophthalmology* article's findings about the public's attitudes about vision loss. NAEVR issued a statement of support for the report's recommendations and has been engaged with fellow sponsors in discussing implementation activities. Obviously, the report provides a "rallying cry" on Capitol Hill for support for vision biomedical research and vision loss prevention research activities. In addition to the October 13 *World Sight Day* Congressional Briefing on the report (see back page), NAEVR joined with Prevent Blindness in meeting with staff of the four co-chairs of the Congressional Vision Caucus to discuss how they may be

supportive of the recommendations. In its dissemination activities, NASEM will work with sponsors to ensure that new Members of the 115th Congress are informed about the report in first-quarter 2017.

I want to thank all of the member organizations who assisted with the extensive advocacy and educational activities held in September and described herein. I especially want to thank the Ophthalmology Department Chairs and Schools/Colleges of Optometry Deans (see box below) who funded researchers to come to Washington, D.C. to describe their research and the impact of NIH/NEI funding increases on their future success. Key to training the next generation of researchers is to prepare them to describe their research and its reliance on federal funding to a public policy-oriented audience.

I want to conclude by acknowledging my mid-August email to all member organizations regarding the 2017 and 2018 NAEVR dues/AEVR contributions increases. As I noted, the increased minimal dues and the five percent increases in each of the next two years are necessary, especially since there has not been an increase since 2008. I can assure you that the Alliances—the only organizations dedicated solely to advocacy and education for federal funding for vision research—will continue to be "lean and mean" by devoting resources to deliverables that make a difference, such as the *JAMA Ophthalmology* article and NASEM report.

The renewal campaign will begin in early December, and I encourage all organizations to continue their support because the challenges have never been greater. As important as dues and contributions are to the Alliances, so are the voices of the member organizations, especially during this time of change, and we will also call upon you for assistance in that regard.

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The Alliances wish to thank Dale Heuer, M.D., Professor and Chairman, Department of Ophthalmology, and Director, Eye Institute, Medical College of Wisconsin. In the August/September timeframe, he engaged four members of his team in advocacy and education—Iris Kassem, M.D., Ph.D. and Daniel Lipinski, Ph.D. in the *Emerging Vision Scientists Day*; Joseph Carroll, Ph.D. in the Blue Cone Monochromacy Congressional Briefing; and Thomas Connor, Jr., M.D. in the Blinded Veterans Association's National Convention. See details inside.

