

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

**FY2017 Funding Increases Are Still a Waiting Game**



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Although this issue of the Report documents activities primarily over a mere three months—from the early May 2016 ARVO Annual Meeting to the mid-July House Appropriations Committee approval of its Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) spending bill—much has occurred, and the Alliances have been engaged every step of the way.

First, I want to acknowledge that the NAEVR and AEVER Board each have elected Gregory Skuta, M.D. (Dean McGee Eye Institute/University of Oklahoma) as a Director. A proven leader in academics and the ophthalmology profession, Greg brings tremendous knowledge and perspective to the Boards. Greg is the official representative from the American Academy of Ophthalmology which, along with ARVO and the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO), are the three founding members of the Alliances. For your information, I have listed the thirteen NAEVR/AEVER Directors in

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addition to Greg and me in the box to the right. I am pleased to work with such outstanding leaders in the vision community to ensure the adequate funding of the Alliances in their role as the “Friends of the National Eye Institute (NEI),” as well as the effectiveness of their voice, as led by NAEVR/AEVER Executive Director James Jorkasky.

Of course, the most newsworthy actions are those by Congress to significantly increase National Institutes of Health (NIH) and NEI funding for a second fiscal year, as well as House action to increase the Vision Research Program (VRP) in Defense appropriations by \$5 million to \$15 million.

Regarding NIH/NEI funding, NAEVR has commended Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Roy Blunt (R-MO) for a bipartisan bill that proposes a second year \$2 billion NIH increase, which reflects his desire to establish a funding pattern of five percent real growth plus biomedical inflation. NAEVR has also recognized House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK) for a bill that proposes a \$1.25 billion NIH increase, especially since he has indicated that the increase is a “floor and not a ceiling” and that he would work with Chairman Blunt to seek the highest possible increase within the budget caps. While commending both leaders for the proposed

overall NIH increase, NAEVR has cautioned that funding increases for the Institutes and Centers (I/Cs) should also be robust and not jeopardized by funding for new initiatives. This is important, since NEI’s FY2016 Operational Net of \$708 million is just 0.8 percent greater than the FY2012 pre-sequester funding level of \$702 million, and that biomedical inflation had continued to erode buying power over those four years.

I do want to recognize that Chairman Blunt and Chairman Cole each have served as a champion for an increase in defense-related vision research through the dedicated VRP line item. This year, and working with Blinded Veterans Association, NAEVR had greater support than ever for the line item and its increase to \$15 million.

As promising as these actions are, it is still a waiting game to see if and how Congress acts to finalize FY2017 appropriations, especially with the looming election recess and implications of the election. Although a Continuing Resolution (CR) to maintain government operations when FY2017 begins on October 1 is likely, the concern is that it could be of a six-month or even a one-year duration. The former means that the NEI would be limited to spending no more in any given month in FY2017 than in FY2016 until a final appropriation is passed. The latter means that there would be no FY2017 funding increase unless the one-year CR specifies NIH as an anomaly and increases its funding.

Although we will not know more until Congress returns in early September, the Alliances have scheduled numerous events that keep vision research front-and-center on Capitol Hill. AEVER will host 22 early-stage investigators in its Second Annual *Emerging Vision Scientists Day* on September 14, which is made possible by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness. This event will begin with AEVER’s annual Congressional Briefing recognizing *International Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) Awareness Week*. A week after that, NAEVR and ARVO will be engaged in the *Rally for Medical Research Advocacy Day*, enabling one last chance before the election recess to engage researchers with their Congressional delegations.

Look for NAEVR to call upon the vision community in September to request that Congress not burden the NIH/NEI with a lengthy CR. In the interim, enjoy the remainder of the Summer and be prepared for a very busy Fall!

Peter J. McDonnell, M.D.  
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New NAEVR/AEVER Director Gregory Skuta, M.D., President and CEO, Dean McGee Eye Institute, University of Oklahoma

**The Alliances’ Directors in addition to Dr. McDonnell and Dr. Skuta:**

- Laurent Attias, M.B.A., Head, Strategy, BD&L and Market Access, Alcon Laboratories, Inc.
- Craig Crosson, Ph.D., Senior Associate Dean for Research, Medical University of South Carolina
- Steven Feldon, M.D., Director, Flaum Eye Institute and Chair, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry
- Yehia Hashad, M.D., Vice President and Global Head, Ophthalmology Global Drug Development, Allergan, Inc.
- Linda Hazlett, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, Wayne State University School of Medicine
- Joan W. Miller, M.D., Chief and Chair of Ophthalmology, Massachusetts Eye & Ear, Harvard Medical School
- Bartly Mondino, M.D., Director, Jules Stein Eye Institute, David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California Los Angeles
- Iris Rush, CAE, Executive Director, ARVO
- William Schmidt, J.D., Chief Executive Officer, Foundation Fighting Blindness
- Earl Smith III, O.D., Ph.D., Dean, University of Houston College of Optometry
- David Tanzer, M.D., Chief Medical Officer and Divisional Vice President, Medical Affairs, Abbott Medical Optics, Inc.
- Thomas Yorio, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of North Texas Health Science Center
- Karla Zadnik, O.D., Ph.D., Dean, Ohio State University College of Optometry

**Fall 2016 Events**

**September 14**

AEVER Congressional Briefing:  
*International AMD Awareness Week 2016*  
12 Noon-1:15 pm, House Rayburn B-338

AEVER Congressional Reception:  
*Second Annual Emerging Vision Scientists Day*  
5:30 – 7:30 pm, House Rayburn 2168 (Gold Room)  
(supported by a grant from RPB)

**September 15**

NAEVR *Emerging Vision Scientists Advocacy Day*

**September 22**

*Rally for Medical Research Advocacy Day* (NAEVR co-sponsors, participates)