

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### “The President Proposes, the Congress Disposes”



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In this first edition of the Report for 2017, you will see the phrase above used throughout to describe Congressional reaction to the dramatic Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 and 2018 budget proposals released by President Trump. Not only do these proposals propose to cut National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding—\$1.2 billion in FY2017 and \$5.8 billion in FY2018—but the latter also promises details by mid-May about proposed changes to NIH’s structure and research prioritization process.

The reality of these proposed changes was emphasized in a March 29 House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee hearing with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Tom Price, M.D., a former House Member. Secretary Price confirmed that the Administration was still developing details about NIH changes to “focus on things that work and get rid of duplication and redundancy in research.” He added that one means to reduce NIH spending was to limit indirect costs in grants since they “are outside of the scope of the specific research.”

So, it is very clear that the research community, vision included, has significant challenges, and NAEVR is creating a Working Group to address these proposals—much like it did in the 2004-2006 timeframe when the House Energy and Commerce (E&C) Committee proposed to “cluster” the National Eye Institute’s (NEI) budget into a “Brain Institute,” potentially jeopardizing front-of-the-eye research. Through NAEVR Executive Director Jim Jorkasky’s leadership, that proposal was successfully defeated. But it took 24/7 advocacy with the authorizers and appropriators to educate about the potential detrimental effects of such an action.

Many Republican leaders have indicated that, although they will take the President’s proposals under advisement, they will continue to fund programs that deliver results. NIH is recognized as one of those

programs and has significant bipartisan support. Both House and Senate LHHS Appropriations Chairs—Tom Cole (R-OK) and Roy Blunt (R-MO), respectively—have expressed their concern about the President’s proposals, proudly noting that they have been working to establish a pattern of \$2 billion annual NIH increases to rebuild its base and maintain the momentum of research. Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) has also expressed his concern, since his Committee and the House E&C Committee led the charge that resulted in Congress passing the *21st Century Cures Act* last December with \$4.8 billion in funding for the NIH Innovation Fund over ten fiscal years. Since that legislation also reauthorized the NIH for three years, those two authorizing Committees may not have the will for a concerted effort to significantly change NIH structure and processes at this time.

Fortunately, the vision community was on Capitol Hill early in the 115th Congress, First Session, with tangible information about the value of NIH/NEI funded research. During the February 17 ARVO Advocacy Day, researchers used ARVO-generated data on the value of Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) for patients and the health care system. Congressional staff—including those of key appropriators and authorizers—thanked the advocates for offering up examples of NIH/NEI value rather than just requesting funding increases. I am especially pleased that, in managing the event for ARVO, NAEVR once again included a track of *Emerging Vision Scientists* who can most eloquently describe the impact of flat or reduced funding on their training and career paths.

NAEVR’s advocacy continues to be enhanced by AEVR education, including that for *World Glaucoma Week* and *Defense Related Vision Research* in first-quarter 2017. Regarding the latter, I want to acknowledge NAEVR/AEVR Board Member Joan Miller, M.D. (Harvard/Mass Eye & Ear) for her support for the *6th Military Vision Symposium on Ocular & Vision Injury*, held at Schepens Eye Research Institute in late March. This meeting brought together the key players in defense vision research, many of whom are funded through the Department of Defense (DOD) Vision Research Program (VRP) for which NAEVR advocates each year.

I wish to thank all of the organizations that committed and paid NAEVR dues and AEVR

contributions in the 2017 renewal campaign, which reflected the first increase since 2008. Both organizations are fully funded and prepared to advocate and educate about the value of vision research as we face these critical NIH/NEI funding and structure issues.

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NAEVR/AEVR Board Member Joan Miller, M.D. (Harvard/Mass Eye & Ear), Steven Baskis (Specialist, U.S. Army, Retired), and NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky at the *6th Military Vision Symposium on Ocular & Vision Injury*. Specialist Baskis, who was the keynote speaker, was blinded in 2008 while serving in Iraq. He has founded the Blind Endeavors Foundation to educate, conduct research, and foster awareness of what is possible—no matter the level of adversity faced.



### NAEVR/AEVR at the 2017 ARVO Annual Meeting

**Sunday, May 7 – Wednesday, May 10**

#### NAEVR Central

9:00 am - 4:00 pm Daily  
Baltimore Convention Center

#### Sunday, May 7

#### ARVO’s Eye and Vision Trauma Session

8:30 am - 10:30 pm, Room 316  
Baltimore Convention Center

#### Monday, May 8

#### NAEVR’s Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities Session

7:30 am - 8:30 am, Room 328  
Baltimore Convention Center