

Capitol Report by Thomas Hagerty, DVM

The MVMA's Governmental Affairs Committee met on November 17, 2016 to discuss and develop the association's legislative agenda for the 2017 Minnesota legislative session. The session begins on January 3rd this year. This is the first year of the biennium and is the budget year. All state agencies must submit their budget requests for the next two years. The MVMA, through its lobbyists, watches this activity very carefully as it relates to veterinary medicine and animal health.

The committee's responsibility is to present to the MVMA's board of directors a recommendation on the issues the committee feels are important to Minnesota's veterinarians. Following a thorough discussion the committee adopts its position and forwards it to the MVMA's board of directors for its approval. This provides direction to the lobbyists for the association and to Dan Tjornehoj and Tom Hagerty as they meet with appropriate legislators.

As a result of the November 8, 2016 general election 32 new legislators will be taking their seats in January. The senate will have 34 republicans and 33 democrats. This is reversal from the 2015-2016 sessions when the democrats were in the majority and had control. All senate committees will have new chairs and a majority number of republicans. Bills that were proposed but not passed in the last session are now dead and must be reentered if that is the wish of the authors. There will be less change in the house of representatives as the republicans retained their control. There will now be 76 republicans and 57 democrats in the house. There are 23 newly elected house members and 9 in the senate.

On the list of priorities of the committee are the biennial budgets of the College of Veterinary Medicine, the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, which is Minnesota's official animal disease laboratory, the Board of Animal Health, and the Board of Veterinary Medicine. Just as important is protecting the independent status of both boards. Funds had been appropriated in the 2015 session to replace aging isolation buildings at the college. New buildings are now being constructed as isolation facilities. Funds that were appropriated for the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory in Willmar resulted in new construction and expansion of that laboratory. A well attended open house was held in September

for the facility. Funds were also secured for updating and remodeling the VDL which will facilitate handling an ever increasing number of samples.

The requirement for criminal back ground checks for all licensees is of concern. The Board of Veterinary Medicine along with all professions must develop a “plan” on implementation of this requirement and submit it to the legislature in this next session. The MVMA is monitoring this proposal for its effect on the members.

The Governmental Affairs Committee was asked by a committee member to consider support for a bill that would ban the use of “gas chambers” for dogs and cats in shelters. Only one shelter is presently using a chamber according to reports. However the bill that had been proposed referred to “animal shelters”. This resulted in a lengthy discussion on the issue. The AVMA has a position on the use of gas chambers and there was a feeling that it may be best to follow the AVMA. There was also concern that this could eventually impact food animals. It was pointed out that during the Avian Influenza outbreak large numbers of turkeys and chickens had to be euthanized quickly to prevent spread of the virus. A motion was made and seconded to support this request. However it was defeated on a voice vote.

Dr. Paul Anderson, Assistant Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, reported on the progress of the Dog and Cat Breeder Bill which has now been in effect for over a year. He stated that there are 120 licensed commercial breeders of which 5 are cat breeders. He said the board has identified over 500 breeders who do not fit the definition of commercial breeder. He stated that the board continues to search for more breeders through expanded awareness of the program.

The next meeting of the committee will be February 24, 2017, during the annual convention. The legislature will be well into the session and the biennial budget report will be out. The lobbyists and your staff will have had an opportunity to meet the new legislators and visit with the committee chairs. The next “Day at the Capitol” will be in March on a date yet to be determined. We encourage you to plan to attend. This is an excellent opportunity for our members to meet the legislators and to help them understand our concerns.