

Capitol Report by Thomas Hagerty, DVM

The Minnesota Legislature convened on January 3, 2017 with 32 new members elected in the November, 2017 general election. There are 201 legislators, 67 senators and 134 representatives. There are 67 legislative districts in the state each represented by one senator and 2 representatives. The MVMA's Governmental Affairs Committee meets two times a year to discuss the actions of the Minnesota Legislature and to review the bills that have been introduced in the current session regarding animals and veterinary medicine. The committee met at 7:00 AM on Friday February 24, 2017 during the MVMA's annual convention.

Several bills have been introduced that the MVMA is interested in. SF 762 would modify the appointment process for the Board of Veterinary Medicine, the licensing board. The board has 7 members, all appointed by the Governor with staggered appointment dates. 5 are veterinarians and 2 are members of the public. At least one public member must be involved in food animal production. Presently these members may reside anywhere in the state. The board has been successful in having representation from various parts of the state and from varied disciplines of veterinary medicine. SF 762 requires that each board member reside in a different congressional district. Minnesota has 8 districts with two in the northern part of the state and 2 in the south. Each district must have nearly equal population. As a result the outstate districts are much larger geographically than the other three. The Government Affairs Committee discussed this bill and it disagrees with the mandatory geographical distribution because of the current challenges of finding applicants for openings. The committee decided that the present system is working well with good representation outside of the metro area as well as small and large animal representation.

HF 1189 addresses the Veterinary Loan Forgiveness program. \$225,000.00 was appropriated in 2009 and \$250,000.00 in 2013. Each qualifying recently graduated veterinarian receives \$15,000 a year for their student loan obligation for a maximum of 5 years. The veterinarian must qualify in each of the 5 years. Six qualifying veterinarians have been accepted into this program since 2009. The MVMA is supporting HF 1189 which is requesting \$500,000.00 in each of the next two years of the 2018-19 legislative biennium.

HF 787 addresses veterinary reporting of animal cruelty, abuse or neglect. Veterinarians are required by law to report to proper authorities. This bill states that a "licensed veterinarian or a person under the direction of a licensed veterinarian, acting in good faith is immune from civil liability for reporting animal abuse or neglect". Committee members were not satisfied with the present bill language and felt it should state specifically "a Minnesota licensed and accredited veterinarian" and should also be limited to pets and companion animals. The MVMA will follow this bill closely as it progresses through the legislative process.

SF 1357 proposes to prohibit the use of non-anesthetic gases for euthanasia in shelters. The committee discussed this issue at the November 16, 2016 meeting. The information that the committee had was that this method is now being used in only one remaining facility. There is a concern of how this would relate to euthanasia in large groups of animals such as turkeys in an Avian influenza outbreak or in a wild life situation. The MVMA will continue to monitor this proposal.

Dr. Julie Wilson, Executive Director of the Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine reported that the criminal background checks required by law currently applies just for new graduates or applicants applying for their Minnesota license. The law requires a plan to be developed to address the process of background checks for currently licensed veterinarians. It remains to be seen how this will be handled and it may take a few years before licensed veterinarians will need to go through the background checks process.

Dr. John Howe, MVMA member and regional representative to the AVMA Executive Board reported on activities of the AVMA and announced that in July at the AVMA annual convention he will announce his intention to run for AVMA president-elect.

The annual "Day at the Capitol" for veterinarians will be held on March 29, 2017 beginning at noon with lunch at the State Office Building. It is important to have as many veterinarians as possible in attendance. Legislators are very responsive to their constituents, particularly when they take the time to come to the capitol. MVMA lobbyists, Cory Bennett and Cullen Sheehan, will make the contacts with your legislators and provide you with talking points. Mark your calendar and make plans to attend.

Remember to make your contribution to VET PAC if you have not already done so. This helps to establish relations with those legislators that are helpful to us.

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