

Capitol Report by by Thomas Hagerty, DVM

The Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association held its annual “Veterinarians Day at the Capitol” on Wednesday, March 29, 2017. Eighteen MVMA members attended this event as did Executive Director Dan Tjornehoj and Government Affairs Committee Chair Tom Hagerty. The meeting was organized by MVMA lobbyists Cory Bennett and Cullen Sheehan and arraigned by Peter Glessing who is responsible for communications and grassroots advocacy for the MVMA's lobbying firm Lockridge, Grindal, Nauen, PPLP.

Each member had an opportunity to meet with their senator and representative when available, usually in their offices. As there were no floor sessions this day legislators could be called from committee meetings if necessary. The members had time to thank their representatives for their support during the 2016 session including additional funding for the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, establishing Animal Trust procedures and providing for temporary suspensions of veterinary licenses. The members then went on to ask support for a number of issues including funding for the College of Veterinary Medicine which is facing some severe cut backs in the University of Minnesota budget that is being debated in the legislature at this time. Also of concern is support for the requests of the Board of Animal Health, and the Board of Veterinary Medicine.

Members discussed with their representatives at length the Veterinary Loan Forgiveness program request. Four veterinary medicine students from the college attended and accompanied Dean Ames as they met with members of the appropriate committees which are discussing this request. Both the senate and the house committees have money included in their bills but at different amounts. This is good news however because being included in both sides increases the chances of ultimately receiving funding for the program.

Representative Paul Anderson, Republican from Starbuck, and chair of the House Agriculture Policy committee spoke to the group on issues being debated in his committee. He continues to be a strong supporter of veterinary medicine and speaks often of his good friend and local veterinarian, now deceased, Sandy Wilson, DVM. Dr. Wilson left a lasting impression of the important and dedicated work of veterinarians.

Bills that were not heard in committee by the deadlines at the end of March will not be considered this session but could be brought up as amendments in either house during floor sessions. Our lobbyists will continue to monitor them however. The budget bills as well as the loan forgiveness bill will continue to be debated during the remainder of this session.

It is not too late to contact your legislator and encourage him or her to support these requests. They are always willing to listen to their constituents and they want to hear from you.

If you have not done so now is a good time to schedule a legislative clinic visit with your representative or senator as they will be back in their districts after this session ends on Monday, May 22.