Capitol Report by Thomas Hagerty, DVM

The Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association was very successful in its support of its legislative agenda in the 2015 session of the Minnesota Legislature. Five priorities were identified by the Government Affairs Committee and adopted by the MVMA board of directors.

While the legislative session ended at midnight on Monday, May 18, 2015 the MVMA' s requests were among many unsettled issues. A special session was convened on Friday, May 29, 2015 to finalize certain proposals. The MVMA's concerns were addressed during this session.

$250,000 for fiscal year 2016 was appropriated to the University of Minnesota for the Veterinary Loan Forgiveness Program. This had not been funded since the program was established in 2009 with $225,000 which provided for three qualifying veterinarians.

Emergency funding of nearly $900,000 was appropriated to address the avian influenza epidemic with $514,000 directed to Minnesota Department of Agriculture for emergency response activities and $379,000 to the Board of Animal Health for emergency response activities not covered by federal funding. An additional $20,000,000 was appropriated to the Department of Ag, the Board of Animal Health, the Commissioner of Health, the Commissioner of Natural Resources, the commissioner of Public Safety, and other state and local governmental agencies to reimburse costs relative to the influenza outbreak.

The legislature passed a significant $370,000,000 bonding proposal in the final hours of the special session. $8,500,000 was included in the bonding bill for the Willmar poultry testing laboratory to address the avian flu epidemic. $18,000,000 was designated for the CVM to replace the isolation facilities which were built in 1959. Funding was included for the U of M Veterinary Diagnostic Lab to increase the throughput of the lab to process the massive increase in avian flu samples.

The Board of Animal Health's biennial budget request of $10,700,000 was approved. The College of Veterinary Medicine's budget and that of the Veterinary

Diagnostic Laboratory were included in the University of Minnesota's budget requests.

A bill had been introduced earlier in the session that would have modified and clarified the temporary suspension provisions of all health related licensing boards including the Board of Veterinary Medicine. It was detailed in scope and required an administrative law judge to preside over a contested case hearing. This item was not included in the final bills so is not in effect but may be revisited in the 2016 legislative session.

The interim period between legislative sessions is an excellent time to meet with your legislators while they are at home in their districts. Thank them for their help of veterinary medicine as well as of animal owners and livestock producers. They have been very responsive to the MVMA's requests and concerns.

The next legislative session will begin on March 8, 2016. This gives us ample time to contact our legislators and to invite them to a clinic visit. These visits have been popular with the legislators and are most helpful when we need to meet with them to discuss our concerns. The MVMA's lobbying group will schedule meetings or tours, will help you prepare, and attend as well.

Please remember to make a contribution to VET-PAC when you are paying your dues. Keep in mind that these contributions must be made by personal check or credit card. The VET-PAC funds are very important when MVMA government affairs members are attending legislators' fundraising events.