

Capitol Report by Thomas Hagerty, DVM

The MVMA's Governmental Affairs Committee met on Friday, February 5 during the MVMA's annual meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Minneapolis to prepare for the 2016 Minnesota legislative session. The session will begin on March 8, 2016 and will conclude on May 23, 2016.

The committee was addressed by the MVMA lobbyists Cullen Sheehan and Cory Bennet. The primary speaker for this meeting was Senator Tony Lourey, DFL, Kerrick, Minnesota, a member of the Senate Health and Human Services Budget Committee and Chair of the Finance Section of the Health and Human Services and Housing Committee.

Senator Lourey is serving his 10th year in the legislature. He discussed those issues that he felt would be paramount in the abbreviated session. Transportation, bonding, education and a tax bill will take up the 10 weeks of the session. He also stressed that broad band availability is very important to rural Minnesota. He stated that legislators are always available to the public especially to their constituents. He encouraged veterinarians to meet their legislators early, get to know them, and contact them during the session when issues affecting the profession come up.

The senator was questioned regarding the requirement for criminal background checks for all veterinarians as is true for all health licensing boards. He stated that this is the result of the abuse of prescription drugs by the public and he did not see the possibility of veterinarians being exempted. He was also reminded of the importance of the availability of antibiotics in animal medicine. The committee discussed the importance of scope of practice issues in the veterinary community. He stated that he was very familiar with these as he remembered all too well the teeth floating discussion and the veterinary chiropractic debate. His final words were "come and see me".

Cory Bennett reviewed the results of the 2015 session and emphasized that the association had been very successful in fulfilling its requests. He reported that since the capitol building is undergoing major renovation it will not be available to the public. The new senate building is open and the DFL senators have their offices in that building. This is open to the public. Senate committee meetings and floor sessions will be held in this building. Republican senators will maintain their offices in the State Office Building. Cory reminded the members that this is an election year and all 201 legislative seats are up for election.

Cullen Sheehan reported that a number of legislators have announced their intentions to retire at the end of session. Four have already done so and special elections have been held for their replacements. He explained how successful the veterinary students had been when they accompanied Dean Ames to a hearing on the student loan forgiveness program. Ultimately that program received \$250,000 in funding from the legislature. He said that the "Veterinarian Day at the Capitol" is scheduled for 12:00 to 4:00 pm on April 5, 2015 and he encouraged all MVMA members to participate. He and Cory will arrange appointments for every one that day.

Cullen also encouraged members of the association to continue to meet with their legislators with “clinic visits” which have been very successful. He said his associate, Peter Glessing, would make the arrangements for anyone interested by contacting the MVMA office

Dr. Bill Hartmann, Executive Director of the Board of Animal Health, announced that he will retire in June of 2016 and the board has instituted a search for his replacement. He has been in this position since June of 2001. He said that the University has received funding for the expansion of the Willmar Poultry Testing Laboratory and this should be completed in the fall of 2016. The laboratory is a shared responsibility of the Board of Animal Health and The College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Hartmann reported on the Dog and Cat breeder licensing program. There are currently 149 dog breeders and 12 cat breeders that are licensed.

Dr. Julia Wilson, Executive Director of the Board of Veterinary Medicine discussed the requirement of the Criminal Background Check for all veterinarians. She also reported on the meetings she has attended with Dr. Cody Wiberg, Executive Director of the Board of Pharmacy, regarding compounding issues.

Dean Ames reported on the state of the college and the initiatives to improve a number of facilities including funding for the isolation facility.

Dr. John Howe, MVMA member and AVMA Executive board member reported on a number of AVMA activities related to proposed congressional action.

Remember, if you have not already done so, to make a contribution to “VET-PAC”. This is the fund that helps Dr. Hagerty and Dan Tjornehoj attend the many fundraisers that we are invited to on behalf of the MVMA. This is an excellent opportunity for us to spend time with the legislators and explain our requests.