

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 11, 2007

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest
213A Whitten Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

I write to you today to express my support for the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA). As you know, there is a rising shortage of veterinarians practicing in the U.S., especially in rural areas such as my home State of Iowa. Consequently, food safety and the health of both humans and animals are at risk. This shortage can be attributed in part to the escalating debt held by many current veterinary students and graduates. A recent study of food supply veterinary medicine identified loan repayment programs as the most effective way to address this shortage.

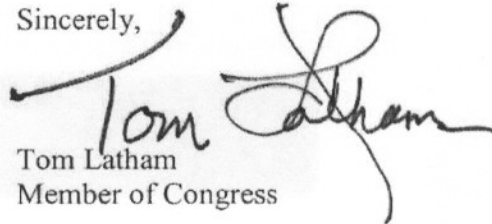
On December 6, 2003, President Bush signed NVMSA into law (P.L. 108-161). The law provides the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with the guidance and recommendations necessary to confront the scarcity of veterinary services in key practice and geographical areas. However, I am concerned with the lack of priority placed, and progress made, by USDA in developing guidelines for the NVMSA.

As a senior member of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, I am well aware of the budgetary shortfalls facing USDA. However, one thing I have learned through my years in Congress, and my relationships with medical professionals, is preventative disease management is much less expensive than treatment measures. I believe NVMSA is a practical investment that has the ability to ensure veterinarians are in place to protect human health and prevent catastrophic disease outbreaks that could result in the loss of billions of dollars to the animal agriculture industry.

I appreciate the foresight you demonstrated in your 2007 Farm Bill examination "Strengthening the Foundation for Future Growth in U.S. Agriculture." As an Iowa farmer, I share your concern with our country's ability to replace an aging population of farmers and approve of your goal of lowering the financial barriers to farm ownership for the next generation farmer. I believe NVMSA has the potential to have a similar affect for veterinarians in that it is likely to reduce financial barriers to rural practice and practice ownership faced by young veterinarians. Like our farmer population, our rural veterinarian population is aging, and failure to replace these essential positions will leave few to care for the animals on the farms about which we both care so much.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and respectfully request that USDA prioritize NVMSA and accelerate its implementation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Latham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Tom Latham
Member of Congress