AVMA Governmental Relations Division & the Legislative Agenda for the 115th Congress

The AVMA’s mission is to lead the profession by advocating for its more than 89,000 member veterinarians. The AVMA seeks to advance the science and practice of veterinary medicine to improve animal and human health. The AVMA Governmental Relations Division actively promotes the Association’s federal legislative and regulatory priorities, monitors legislative developments, keeps members updated on activities, educates congressional lawmakers and policymakers working for federal agencies, and liaises with strategic partners.

The GRD team, based in Washington, DC, is comprised of a director, three assistant directors/lobbyists, an administrative manager, a communications manager, a program manager, a staff assistant, an administrative assistant, and two consultants – one for lobbying and the other to manage the AVMAPAC.

GRD Staff Areas of Responsibility

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- Federal Budget
- Federal Appropriations
- Veterinary Education
- Student Financial aid
- Small Business
- Tax issues
- Veterinary Workforce
- Association issues

- Animal Welfare
- Animal Transportation
- Zoo & Wildlife issues
- Endangered Species Act
- Aquatic Veterinary Medicine
- Environment, conservation & EPA
- Guardianship and Ownership
- Human Animal Bond

- Animal Health & Research
- Pharmaceuticals & Veterinary Biologics
- Public Health
- Food Safety
- Biotechnology
- Bio- & Agro-terrorism
- Emergency Response
- Homeland Security
- Farm Bill Issues

AVMA’s Legislative Agenda for the 115th Congress

The AVMA will work on a number of priority issues during the 115th Congress, which will end in Dec. 2018. We anticipate the following issues to continue on from the previous congress.

Compounding

The AVMA updated its policies on compounding, both the overarching and compounding from bulk ingredients in nonfood and food animals, in June 2013. This was necessary and timely, given the fungal meningitis outbreak in humans in the fall of 2012 and resulting legislative action. The Drug Quality and Security Act (P.L.113-54) was signed into law in Nov. 2013, however it was not intended to change animal drug compounding or impact animal drug compounding in any way.

In Feb. 2014, AVMA established a Task Force on Veterinary Compounding Legislation to develop a legislative proposal pursuant to AVMA’s revised policies on compounding. The Task Force delved into topics of importance to the profession: maintaining office stock, compounding from bulk ingredients, adverse event reporting, and quality assurance. They also considered the role that drug shortages and the preservation of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) approval process play in the access to compounded preparations. The Task Force sent recommendations for legislation to the AVMA Board of Directors’ meeting in June 2016, which were approved. Legal counsel has finalized draft legislative language and it is currently being reviewed by AVMA entities, state veterinary medical associations and allied constituent associations. Once approved by the Board, we hope to have it introduced in the 115th Congress.
FDA published draft guidance for compounding animal drugs from bulk drug substances in May 2015. This notice called for public comment, which closed in mid-Nov 2015. AVMA appreciates the feedback we received from members, allied organizations, and state veterinary medical associations. FDA has informed us that they made changes to the draft guidance after reviewing the comments and publication is forthcoming; there is no known projected date for publication of another draft or finalization of the guidance.

**Mandatory Prescription Writing**

The Fairness to Pet Owners Act (H.R. 623), which would mandate veterinarians to provide a written prescription for companion animals, was reintroduced by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT-3) on January 24, 2017. It was referred to the House Energy & Commerce Committee.

Similar legislation was introduced in the 112th, 113th and 114th congresses. During the 114th Congress, Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Charles Schumer (D-NY) led the effort in the Senate; Reps. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT-3) and Matt Cartwright (D-PA-17) led the effort in the House. The Senate bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation; the House’s version was referred to the Energy & Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing & Trade. The House subcommittee held an informational hearing, the “Pet Medications Industry: Issues and Perspectives” in April 2016. AVMA’s Board of Director’s Chair, Dr. John de Jong, testified alongside the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and a representative from TruScience (a generic drug manufacturer supporting the legislation). AVMA has been actively working to defeat the legislation for three congresses -- the 112th, 113th and the 114th.

Additionally, the FTC published a report in May 2015 following a one-day public workshop they hosted in Oct. 2012. This workshop was meant to examine competition and consumer protection issues in the pet medications industry.

**Antimicrobial Resistance & Antimicrobial Use in Food Animals**

Legislation has been introduced for a number of the past congresses to limit the use of medically important antimicrobials in food animals. AVMA has fervently opposed previous bills that attempt to restrict veterinarians’ ability to appropriately treat their patients.

FDA published the Final Rule on the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) in June 2015 and it went into effect in January 2017. AVMA has been very engaged with FDA throughout this revision and has recently developed VFD resources related to the new rule.

Former President Obama released an Executive Order on Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria in Sept. 2014 and called for $1.2 billion in funding for FY 2016 for activities related to antibiotic resistance. The use of antibiotics in food animals is a component of this discussion. AVMA is supportive of new funding for FDA and USDA to implement components of this strategy.

**Criminalization of the practice of soring horses**

AVMA has supported the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R.3268/S.1121 in the 114th Congress) which amends the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The legislation as previously introduced would designate additional unlawful acts with regard to the practice of soring horses. It would also strengthen penalties for violations and improves USDA enforcement. The PAST Act had broad bipartisan support with 272 cosponsors in the House and 49 cosponsors in the Senate in the 114th Congress. It has not yet been introduced in the 115th Congress.

USDA issued a final rule entitled Horse Protection; Licensing of Designated Qualified Persons and Other Amendments, in Jan. 2017 that would achieve the relative goals of the PAST Act. This rule is currently pending review in a regulatory freeze. AVMA was engaged with USDA throughout the rulemaking process and is in support of the final rule, however AVMA seeks to have these changes codified through the PAST Act.

**Criminalizing the act of animal crushing**

Legislation was introduced in a previous Congress to amend the federal criminal code to prohibit intentionally engaging in animal crushing in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or within the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States. AVMA supported The Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act (H.R.2293/S.1831) in the 114th Congress and anticipates it will be reintroduced. Current law only prohibits knowingly creating or distributing an animal...
crush video. This legislation adds exceptions for conduct that is for predator or pest control, medical or scientific research, or necessary to protect the life or property of a person from a serious threat caused by an animal.

**Federal Student Financial Aid, Higher Education Act Reauthorization**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
AVMA recognizes that educational debt can be a significant burden on aspiring veterinarians and early career veterinarians and it has broader implications for the veterinary profession. AVMA is focused on ameliorating shortcomings in the federal student aid system as congress works to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. AVMA is working to advance legislation that would: 1) end origination fees; 2) reinstate subsidized Stafford Loan for health professions students; 3) lower interest rates on federal student loans; 4) maintain federal student loan limits for health professions students; 5) permit refinancing; 6) increase awareness and participation in income-driven repayment plans; 7) maintain the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program; 8) help borrowers manage educational debt and increase financial literacy; and (9) establish eligibility for grants and scholarships.

**E-Fairness, H.R. 2193 / S. 976**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
AVMA supports e-fairness legislation because it impacts the bottom line of veterinary practices. Online retailers selling pet medications, products or equipment have a built-in advantage of as much as 10% over brick-and-mortar businesses simply because they do not collect legally owed sales taxes. Bipartisan, bicameral legislation was introduced on April 27, 2017 to make it easier for states to collect sales taxes from online purchases.

**Overtime Pay & Exempt Employees**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
The current threshold to qualify for overtime pay for exempt salaried employees is $23,476. The overtime regulation was last adjusted in 2004. AVMA has urged congress to require the Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct an economic analysis on small businesses and nonprofit employers before promulgating an overtime rule before an adjustment is made. DOL, on May 16, 2016, issued an overtime rule for exempt salaried employees. The rule would have made exempt employees earning less than $47,476 annually qualified for time-and-a-half when they work more than 40 hours a week. On Nov. 22, 2016 a federal circuit judge put the rule on hold just days before it was to take effect on Dec. 1. During the 114th Congress, AVMA supported legislation (H.R. 5813) to phase-in increases to the salary threshold and eliminate automatic increases to the salary threshold.

**Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program Enhancement Act, S. 487 / H.R. 1268**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
AVMA supports legislation that would result in increasing access to veterinary servicing in rural America by exempting the VMLRP program awards from taxation. Loan repayments made by the VMLRP are taxable income to participants. To partially offset the increase in income tax liability that result from the VMLRP award, USDA provides a federal tax payment equal to 39% of the loan payment the participant to pay the tax owed. Both loan and tax payments are reported after the end of the calendar year. Participants are responsible for paying the remainder of their federal tax liability, as well as any applicable state and local taxes that result from their VMLRP income. The cost per VMLRP award over an initial three-year contract is $104,250 ($75,000 for the loan repayment award and $29,250 for withholding taxes). Between 2010 and 2016, USDA has offered 388 VMLRP awards to veterinarians; meanwhile nearly 1,200 veterinarians have applied to the program. Had awards been exempted since 2010, there would be roughly 130 more veterinarians under contract. VMLRP veterinarians now practice in 45 states, Puerto Rico and on U.S. federal lands. Leading the effort in the U.S. Senate is Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) with Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), and in the U.S. House of Representatives the sponsor is Rep. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.-3) with Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wisc.-3).  

**Employer Participation in Student Loan Assistance, H.R. 795 , S. 796**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
AVMA has a record of support for giving employers a recruitment and retention tool that ultimately reduces educational debt. This bipartisan, bicameral legislation would allow employers to give employees up to $5,250/year towards repayment of student loans. The employer would get a tax break while employees would not be taxed on the money. Absent the tax benefit any help an employer were to give an employee would be considered compensation. Leading the effort in the House is Rep. Rodney Davis (R-Ill.13) with Rep. Scott Peters (D-Calif.-52). The senate companion bill has not yet been introduced although one is expected.

**Expanding Student Loan Interest Deduction**  
Key Staff: Gina Luke  
Broadening the student loan interest deduction will permit veterinary professionals to access the provision. AVMA
urges the deduction to be increased from $2,500 to $5,000 for individuals ($10,000 for joint filers) and the income phase-outs be repealed, currently $65,000 for individuals ($130,000 for joint filers).

**Workforce discrimination**

AVMA supports amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protections banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The Civil Rights Act (P.L. 88-352) outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In addition, the law ended unequal application of voter registration requirements and racial segregation in schools, in the workplace and by facilities servicing the general public.

**Federal appropriations for fiscal 2018**

AVMA seeks federal funding in support of federal programs and agencies directly impacting veterinary medicine, animal health and welfare, food safety, disease surveillance and public health. Additionally, AVMA actively engages with coalitions to bolster funding for food and agricultural research, biomedical research and antibiotic resistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Agency / Department</th>
<th>Final FY17</th>
<th>AVMA's Fiscal 2018 recommendation</th>
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<td>Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program</td>
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<td>Veterinary Services Grant Program</td>
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<td>National Rabies Management Program</td>
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<td>Food Safety and Inspection Service report language requested for recruitment and retention of veterinary medical officers</td>
<td>USDA-FSIS</td>
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<td>$10 million set-aside within $1.032 billion</td>
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<td>National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System</td>
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</table>

AVMA joins coalition letters in support of fiscal 2018 support for programs advancing animal health and welfare, food and agriculture research, biomedical research, food safety as well as antibiotic resistance. Among the coalitions we join include the following: the Animal Agriculture Coalition, National Coalition for Food and Agriculture Research, Supporters of Agricultural Research, the AFRI Coalition, the Friends of ARS, the National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science, U.S. Stakeholder Forum on Antimicrobial Resistance, the Adhoc Group for Medical Research, the Coalition on Biodefense and Public Health Preparedness, and Wildlife Services Coalition.

**Veterinarians in Federal Service**

The AVMA is supporting the National Association of Federal Veterinarian’s plan to improve recruitment and retention of public health veterinarians within the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). FSIS has not made PHV positions sufficiently attractive to keep more highly-qualified veterinarians employed. There is no mechanism for most PHVs to use their knowledge outside slaughter establishments to assist in policy development and the career ladder for PHVs who wish to advance is inadequate. In addition, PHV vacancies can create double or triple workloads for the remaining PHVs, preventing them from timely supervision of plant operations, interfering with attendance at training and continuing education courses, and negatively impacting work/life balance. Often this leads to burnout and further PHV vacancies as these veterinarians leave FSIS for more desirable positions in other federal agencies or elsewhere.
AVMA’s Public Policy & Advocacy Outreach Programs

The Role of the AVMAPAC
AVMA members may contribute to the AVMA Political Action Committee which provides opportunities to support and elect candidates who understand veterinary medicine and support our legislative agenda. The AVMA PAC manager is Natalie Thomas (202.289.3206, natalie@ntdcinc.com).

AVMA Congressional Fellowship Program
Three veterinarians are selected annually for the AVMA’s Fellowship Program. Participants serve for one year in Washington D.C. as scientific advisors to members of Congress and play pivotal roles in shaping public policy. AVMA pays a stipend for each fellow.

AVMA Externship Program
The AVMA-GRD Externship Program provides third and fourth year veterinary students with one four-week rotation in AVMA’s Washington, DC office. Externs are introduced to public policy and advocacy and given opportunities to work on the AVMA’s legislative priorities. Externs earn a $1,200 stipend for the month. To learn more visit, http://www.avma.org/advocacy/get_involved/externships.asp.

Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus (CVMC)
There are three veterinarians serving in the U.S. House of Representatives:
✓ Rep. Kurt Schrader DVM, is a Democrat from Oregon’s 5th district and this is his 4th term in Congress.
✓ Rep. Ted Yoho DVM, is a Republican from Florida’s 3rd district and this is his 2nd term in Congress.
✓ Rep. Ralph Abraham DVM, MD, is a Republican from Louisiana’s 5th district and this is his 1st term in Congress.

Reps. Schrader and Yoho established the bi-partisan CVMC to provide a forum to educate elected members and their staff on the importance of veterinary medicine to research, public health, animal health and welfare, food safety, and our overall economy. The caucus also keeps members informed about the opportunities and challenges facing veterinary medicine.

Members of the Veterinary Medicine Caucus as of May 12, 2017

Co-chair, Kurt Schrader, DVM (OR-5) John Garamendi (CA-3)
Co-chair, Ted Yoho, DVM (FL-3) Morgan Griffith (VA-9)
Ralph Abraham, DVM (LA-5) Gregg Harper (MS-3)
Matt Cartwright (PA-17) Vicky Hartzler (MO-4)
Lois Capps (CA-24) Alcee Hastings (FL-20)
Jim Costa (CA-16) Jody Hice (GA-10)
Joe Courtney (CT-2) Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18)
Rodney Davis (IL-13) Walter Jones (NC-3)
Susan Davis (CA-53) David Joyce (OH-14)
Peter DeFazio (OR-4) Trent Kelly (MS-1)
Suzanne DelBene (WA-1) Ann Kuster (NH-3)
John Duncan (TN-2) Dan Lipinski (IL-3)
Bill Flores (TX-17) Betty McCollum (MN-4)

Jim McGovern (MA-2)
Donald Norcross (NJ-1)
Mark Pocan (WI-2)
Jared Polis (CO-2)
David Price (NC-4)
Mike Rogers (AL-3)
Peter Roskam (IL-6)
Kyrsten Sinema (AZ-9)
GT Thompson (PA-5)
Filemon Vela (TX-34)
Jackie Walorski (IN-2)
David Young (IA-3)
Kevin Yoder (KS-3)