

The government relations division of the AVMA is diligently working to convince Congress to provide federal funding for the National Veterinary Medical Service Act. If fully funded, that act could go a long way toward encouraging recent graduates to practice food animal medicine in under-served areas and provide veterinary services to the federal government in emergency situations. Just last month, the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee approved \$750,000 for a pilot program. We applaud the efforts of Representatives Pickering and Turner . . . and Senators Cochran and Harkin . . . all of whom sponsored the original bill. And I want to thank the Appropriations Subcommittee, especially Senator Brownback for his kind words and commitment to veterinary medicine.

AVMA is also lobbying our federal legislators to pass the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act . . . an important piece of legislation that will provide us with sorely needed public health and public practice veterinarians. Today's public health practitioners play an invaluable role in U.S. agriculture, food safety, zoonotic disease control, animal welfare, homeland security and international standards and trade. Without an adequate number of public health veterinarians, the wellbeing of our nation—yes, even the world—is at risk. Senator Allard has been invaluable and unwavering in his dedication to moving this act forward through the complicated legislative process. I intend to do everything I can as president to provide support to Senator ALLARD's effort to pass the veterinary workforce expansion act.

On the international education level, AVMA has been committed to the global unity of the profession for decades. The AVMA Council on Education has partnered with Canada since the accreditation system was developed and has accredited six foreign veterinary colleges. We are working with six additional schools. We're extremely proud of those colleges. As more inquiries come forward, it's self evident that the world looks to us as the gold standard in educational goals and expectations.

At the same time, I will be supporting the efforts of our specialty organizations to attract and train the new practitioners they need. Currently, there are 20 veterinary specialty organizations comprising 37 distinct areas of expertise under the AVMA umbrella.

The AVMA economic report on veterinarians and veterinary practices has revealed a substantial difference between the incomes of specialists and non-specialists practicing in similar disciplines. I will, as president, encourage the development of additional in-depth financial surveys that, hopefully, will motivate our undergraduates to further their education and achieve specialty status . . . thus helping ensure that public demand for advanced veterinary medical services are being met while, at the same time, increasing our economic base.

Hopefully, these additional specialists will serve as a resource for our veterinary colleges who are becoming increasingly understaffed.

In the past fifteen years, we've seen a shift in the demographics of our profession. I'll bet there were plenty of raised eyebrows when McKillips College, in 1903, and the Chicago Veterinary College, in 1910, graduated our country's first female veterinarians. It's hard to believe that as recently as 1963 the profession included only 277 female veterinarians.

We're proud of the fact that an increasing number of our graduates are women. Their contributions and leadership have strengthened our profession. However, the recent AVMA-Pfizer study confirmed lower mean female incomes within the profession. Now is

the time to explore solutions to that problem, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that this issue is thoroughly investigated and addressed.

To achieve unity, I firmly believe that we must be inclusive, not exclusive. The public has always been well served by the diversity in our practice areas. Now, we must diversify our membership. The AVMA . . . with more than 72,000 members representing 68 constituent organizations in the House of Delegates . . . must now seek to represent every race, creed and color. As a profession, we must mirror the public, and they us. We must become a profession more reflective of the population we serve.

Over thirty years ago, Dr. H.J. Magrane, then president of the AVMA, spoke often and passionately about the need for inclusion and equality in our profession. As a profession, we have still not made the advances in diversity that are necessary.

As the great social scientist Margaret Mead said . . . "in diversity . . . we will add to our strength."

In order to achieve our diversity goals, we must initiate both practical and creative ideas to arrive at an enriched membership. It's up to us . . . all of us . . . to reach out to young people and to nurture their interests and talents so that we become the shining example of professional diversity. We need to be involved in youth groups, in churches, and in our public schools . . . and united in our quest, so that others say, "we must emulate the AVMA."

Once in veterinary school, our students . . . all our students . . . need to know that we, as a profession, are there to mentor and to help them through the special challenges they face. None of us got to where we are today without at least one special person . . . one special veterinarian . . . who took us under his or her wing and proved to be our own, personal cornerstone. We can do no less for those who are striving today to become members of our profession.

In what programs is the AVMA currently involved concerning diversity? First, at its April 2005 meeting, the Board approved the establishment of a Task Force on Diversity. That task force will recommend steps that we must take to meet our goals in diversity.

But here's something you can do in the immediate future. Tomorrow, our convention will offer a full day diversity symposium, including an appearance by Doctor Debbye Turner, veterinarian, former Miss America and contributor to the CBS early show. I hope many of you will plan on spending part of your day attending these important meetings, if time permits.

Diversity will also be an integral part of the 2006 Veterinary Leadership Conference. Each of these opportunities is designed to help us achieve the diversity we've talked about for so long.

So what's on our want list for 2005? As I've mentioned, critical shortages exist in food animal and public health veterinarians. But we also are desperately in need of teachers and researchers. We need policy experts and homeland security professionals. We need legislative leaders, and we need veterinarians who are visionaries and who can lead us in this era of globalization. There exists such critical shortages in so many areas that some days I wonder if our small numbers can, in fact, make a difference.

But then I am asked to speak somewhere. And I look at the enthusiastic faces in my audience . . . established veterinarians who are deeply involved in their state and local associations, students who live and breathe only to count off the days until they can touch their dream, high school students with straight A's who are anxious to know what else they have to do to make it into veteri-

nary school, third graders with a commitment to animals that rivals the grit and determination of a Jack Russell terrier . . . and I know that we will not only survive . . . but thrive.

As I've said, my presidency will be dedicated to re-energizing the unity that has always been our strength and foundation. As another president from the northeast, John F. Kennedy, once said, "Let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests."

Ladies and gentlemen, our common interests are so much greater than our differences. Like the society and world around us, we are changing. And change is never easy. But with your help, and our combined dedication and attention to preserving and protecting our unity of purpose, we will thrive and remain one of the most admired and respected professions in the world.

During the coming year, I will be looking to you for help. I will listen . . . and I will participate. I will follow your lead . . . and I will lead to enlighten. I implore each of you to participate in this great organization and make it your own. For you are the teachers . . . you are the visionaries . . . you are veterinary medicine.

Thank you.

#### NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, today I rise to congratulate an Illinois resident who has received national recognition for her contributions to the American artistic community. Ms. Albertina Walker of Chicago, the "Queen of Gospel Music," has been selected to receive a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts, NEA.

The highest honor in the field of folk and traditional arts, these fellowships are awarded to 12 outstanding artists each year to recognize their contributions to their fields. They are selected based on their artistic excellence and cultural authenticity.

National Heritage Fellowships are not open to application but are based on nominations from members of the public. Begun in 1982, these fellowships consist of a \$20,000 grant and are part of the NEA's mission of supporting excellence in the arts, both new and traditional. Previous National Heritage Fellowship recipients have included such artists as B.B. King and John Lee Hooker.

The Grammy-award winning Ms. Walker is a native of Chicago and has been involved in gospel music for over 70 years. She has recorded over 60 albums and is an active member of West Point Missionary Baptist Church.

I thank the National Endowment for the Arts for its recognition of Ms. Walker's outstanding work and once again applaud Ms. Walker for her achievement.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF BUFFALO, NORTH DAKOTA

● Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize a community in