

Thank You for Your Legislative—and Financial—Support!

By Herbert Whiteley

Without veterinary practitioners like you, our College would not exist. Although the General Assembly authorized creation of the College of Veterinary Medicine in 1919, the state went without a center for veterinary education, research, and service for 25 more years. It took a forceful contingent of veterinarians to convince state legislators in the early 1940s to provide funding to make the College a reality.

Today your voices are again being heard in Springfield. Earlier this year ISVMA members lobbied in the capital, pointing out the value of higher education generally to the future economic, cultural, and societal health of the state. A corollary message was that our College plays a key role in protecting the health and welfare of both the people and the animals of Illinois.

State support is critically needed. When we look at our peer institutions—the University of California-Davis, Colorado State, Cornell, Michigan State, the University of Minnesota, North Carolina State, Ohio State, Purdue, and the University of Wisconsin—we discover that Illinois ranks last in state support. Although only four of these institutions educate a greater number of veterinary students, we rank eighth in the number of faculty members.

Only 3 percent of our teaching hospital's budget is funded by state appropriations, compared with 9 percent at Purdue, 11 percent at Ohio State, and 13 percent at Minnesota. State appropriations make up nearly one-fourth of the teaching hospital budget at Wisconsin and Michigan State, more than a third at UC-Davis, and nearly half at Cornell.

When comparing all 26 U.S. veterinary institutions that receive state support, Illinois falls at 42 percent, or \$7 million, below the national mean for total state dollars and 50 percent, or \$8 million, below the national mean for state dollars per DVM student.

Our limited state support makes it more difficult to recruit and retain a full cadre of faculty experts, to extend our service and Extension resources to practitioners and animal owners throughout the state, and to achieve our vision as a leader in veterinary and biomedical education,

research, and public engagement. Nevertheless, throughout the budget cuts that occurred every year from 2002 to 2006, our top priority was to steward existing resources to maintain the integrity and strength of the DVM degree program.

For the past year the nation's veterinary colleges have been speaking out about the need for funding at the federal level. Veterinarians perform critical roles in protecting the nation's food supply, guarding against foreign animal diseases, and developing and implementing plans for bioterrorism prevention and response. The responsibility for veterinary education, therefore, must not rest solely on the 26 states where the colleges reside.

After the March meeting of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), I and other veterinary deans and department heads made more than 120 visits to representatives and senators in Washington, D.C. We advocated for the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act (S.914/H.R.2206), a bill designed to significantly increase the number of veterinarians serving the country in public health, public practice, and bioterrorism prevention.

The Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act would authorize a competitive grants program to expand capacity and services at the nation's veterinary medical colleges. It represents the first time in more than 30 years that the federal government would provide resources to increase the number of veterinarians serving in these critical societal roles.

According to the AAVMC, there is a current shortage of 1,500 veterinarians working in public health areas. Over the next 20 years, that number will rise to 15,000. But passage of the Veterinary Workforce Expansion Act will mitigate the current and future shortages of veterinarians in public health areas.

With our comprehensive facility plan in place, our College is prepared to capitalize on these federal grants if the act is approved. At the same time, we are doing everything we can to boost our budget through innovative and collaborative programs to share faculty and resources within the University of Illinois, through increased research funding, and by generating private support.

We encourage each of you to learn more about the College's facility plan and strategic plan for the future. You'll find them on our Web site at <http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/deans/cvmplan.html>.

With the continued support of veterinary practitioners in Illinois—both in the legislative arena and through giving—the College will achieve its vision of national and global leadership in veterinary education, research, and outreach. Thank you!