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Letter to the Editor | Court Ruling's Impact on Horse Racing in the Territory

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April was a horrible month for horse racing fans in the territory, as the Sport of Kings suffered a tremendous blow with a recent District Court ruling. The District Court ruled that Southland Gambling has a legally binding contract with the Government of the Virgin Islands through the V.I. Lottery, and that the law passed in December 2016 which allowed for the contract between VIGL and the Government of the Virgin Islands was unconstitutional.

My interest in this matter lies solely with Virgin Islanders involved in the horse racing industry - the jockeys, the groomers, the trainers, the horse owners, and the horse racing enthusiasts. The ruling that was handed down places the industry in jeopardy. The unknown is clear and present. What can and what should we be doing to ensure that live horse racing returns to the territory?

There are 3 branches of government, each with very different functions, the Judicial Branch interprets laws and decides on discrepancies/disputes between the other two branches of government. The Judicial Branch has highlighted issues that caused this matter to be before the courts. One such issue is the non-existence of a definition of video lottery terminal in the V.I. Code. To that end, I have drafted and submitted legislation to create a definition based on the court's ruling. Further, there was mention of "regulation" of video lottery terminals. As such, I have also drafted and submitted legislation to create a Virgin Islands Gaming Commission, which will regulate ALL gaming activities in the Virgin Islands. Lastly, I have been in constant communication with the Office of the Governor urging for an amicable resolution that will bring live horse racing back to St. Croix and St. Thomas.

This matter clearly demonstrates how rushing legislation, through the "special order or assign to the floor process" can prove to be detrimental to the people of the Virgin Islands.

When bills are not properly vetted through the committee process, the results can be damaging. Drafting, vetting, discussing, and amending legislation, are important steps in the process of a bill becoming a law. When these steps are circumvented, we can get what we got when the court ruled, complete and utter confusion.

Senators must thoroughly vet legislation, appointments/nominations, contracts and zoning changes. The people pay the price when this is not done. "Hurry dog, eat raw meat", as our elders say. As the 2020 election draws near, we will see bills special-ordered to the floor to boost political campaigns. What may glitter like a golden solution, may just be well shined brass in sunlight. Demand and Expect Better, and Better will be Got!

Submitted on Monday by Senator Alicia V. Barnes.