logo Image not found or type unknown

Southland Seeks “Closure” on Horse Racing Deal as Bryan Warns Senate May Send Measure to Die in Committee

Southland says it has spent $785,000 on the first 11 races and cannot keep absorbing losses without a clear path forward, while Bryan warns that sending the revised St. Croix agreement to committee during Tuesday’s special session could end the deal.

Government / **Published On July 21, 2026 08:04 AM /**

Janeka Simon July 21, 2026

Image not found or type unknown

ST. CROIX — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday questioned whether the 36th Legislature intends to give a revised agreement to restore horse racing at the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack fair consideration, as Southland Gaming of the Virgin Islands warned that it cannot continue absorbing losses or planning future races without a clear decision from the government.

The governor raised the concerns hours before a special legislative session he convened for Tuesday, when lawmakers are scheduled to consider the revised agreement between the Government of the Virgin Islands and Southland Gaming.

Mr. Bryan said Senate President Milton Potter had reportedly not invited representatives of the administration, the company or other stakeholders to testify during the session.

“We checked around. No one has any letters,” the governor said. “We didn’t get any letter inviting us to testify.”

Consortium journalists contacted Mr. Potter to determine whether any testifiers had been invited to appear before the Legislature. As of press time, no response had been received.

Bryan Says Senate Did Not Move Agreement Forward

Mr. Bryan accused the Legislature of resisting the proposal throughout the process, saying he initially hoped lawmakers would consider the revised agreement without the need for a special session.

“I sought to avoid calling the legislature into a special session, with the hope that the Senate President would bring leadership to the measure and forward it for a hearing, and that they would vote in a manner consistent with moving this project ahead without unnecessary delay. Unfortunately, that did not occur,” he said.

With no testifiers apparently scheduled to participate Tuesday, Mr. Bryan questioned whether lawmakers planned to fully consider the agreement.

“Whether up or down, yea or nay, support or no support, we need to come to a decision,” he declared.

The governor said he had heard reports that lawmakers may intend “to open the session and send [the agreement] to committee,” which he argued would effectively end the proposal.

“The games are getting tiring,” the governor declared. “We have reached a point where further delay could cost us this entire opportunity,” he lamented.

Mr. Bryan said avoiding a vote could “send a negative message to the private investor and certainly to our community and the horsemen that our legislature in the Virgin Islands is not serious about economic development.”

Southland Says Continued Uncertainty is Unsustainable

In a July 10 letter to Mr. Bryan, Southland Gaming said it had invested $785,000 in the first 11 races held at the Clinton Phipps Racetrack on St. Thomas, excluding purses, and would need to invest approximately $2.8 million more to give the operation a chance of breaking even.

“As much as we believe in this sport, SGVI cannot continue to absorb these losses and run races indefinitely without a clear path forward. Operating without resolution is simply not sustainable for us or for the many people who have invested in this industry,” the company wrote.

Southland said it completed the rebuilding of Clinton Phipps more than three years ahead of the agreed deadline and incurred additional costs to help restart horse racing in the territory.

The company later partnered with the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation and provided financing to resume racing for Carnival 2024 after a seven-year absence. According to the letter, 12 races have since been conducted, including three Governor's Cup events.

Southland said horse owners and vendors from St. Thomas, St. Croix and Tortola had made significant investments in horses, equipment, employees and facilities with the expectation that racing would continue.

"These men and women are not casual participants. Vendors and horse owners have made sizable investments in horses, equipment, staff, and facilities, based on the expectation that horse racing in the Virgin Islands will continue and grow. Every day that passes without a clear path forward puts those investments at risk."

The company emphasized that the uncertainty was not limited to St. Thomas, describing the horse-racing industry on St. Croix as larger and noting that its owners, vendors and supporters were closely watching the government's next steps.

Southland said the absence of a decision had also prevented it from offering participants a proposed 2026 racing calendar.

"I feel bad, and I am at times dismayed, when I am asked 'when are we running again,' because we are simply not in a position to readily answer. We would love to present these men and women with a proposed calendar of races for 2026, but we cannot do so without knowing where we are heading and what is required to improve on what we have accomplished thus far."

Southland said it had spent the previous year working on agreements intended to provide clarity for the industry and understood that action would follow after the documents were submitted to the Legislature in April.

"For the past year we have worked on mutual agreements to bring clarity to this situation. It was our understanding that once you submitted these agreements to the Legislature in April of this year, action would be taken. That has not happened, though we have met, revisited, and revised these agreements at the stakeholder's request. We now need closure, one way or the other."

The company asked Mr. Bryan to help determine "where we go from here."

Mr. Bryan cited that correspondence Monday in warning that the investor's patience would not last indefinitely.

"The investor has now shared correspondence with my office expressing serious concern…and questioning the government's level of commitment to completing the project," Governor Bryan disclosed.

"Private investors cannot be expected to wait indefinitely while decisions that are essential to moving a project forward remain unresolved."

The revised agreement contains several changes intended to address objections raised about the original proposal to redevelop the St. Croix racetrack.

Reporting requirements covering revenue were strengthened, while a proposed complete exemption from gross receipts taxes was reduced.

The revised agreement also doubled the revenue share allocated to St. Thomas-St. John horsemen and extended Southland Gaming’s tenure as promoter to at least five years.

Before the revisions were completed, Senator Kurt Vialet said he would not support the agreement in its original form.

It remains unclear whether Mr. Vialet or other lawmakers have additional objections to the revised agreement scheduled for consideration Tuesday.