

The Virgin Islands Consortium

TRAXCO Will Vacate The Randall 'Doc' James Racetrack On Friday

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ST. CROIX -- In a letter addressed to Casino Control Commission Chairwoman Violet Ann Golden, TRAXCO revealed that it would vacate the Randall 'Doc' James racetrack on May 6, following a complaint filed by the Department of Justice in District Court here asking the court to force TRAXCO out of the Randall 'Doc' James racetrack, a complaint predicated on past violations of a sub-lease and delinquent payments to the Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation.

Through a Freedom of Information Act request, The Consortium obtained the [letter](#) from the Department of Justice that was addressed to Ms. Golden. In it, TRAXCO said Attorney General Claude Walker had threatened criminal sanctions if TRAXCO (and thus

its subtenants, including Treasure Bay V.I. Corp. (T.B.V.I.) which runs the Divi Carina Bay Casino), did not remove itself from the Randall 'Doc' James racetrack.

"Although TRAXCO believes that the claims for termination are invalid and that the threat of criminal sanctions are unjustified, neither TRAXCO nor TBVI will put itself and its officers, directors and employees at risk given that these threats come from the highest ranking legal official in the territory," reads the letter addressed to Ms. Golden.

"Accordingly, while TRAXCO is reserving all of its rights and does not agree that the Lease has been terminated or has expired, TRAXCO will comply with the Attorney General's demand, under duress, and vacate the property by the close of business on May 6, 2016 and has required that its subtenant, Treasure Bay V.I. Corp., do the same."

The news will come as a relief to horsemen who have contended that TRAXCO had been unfair in its treatment to members of the Flamboyant Horsemen's Association (F.H.A.). TRAXCO had refused to vacate the property on April 25, which was originally requested by the Department of Property and Procurement, and had taken the Government of the Virgin Islands to court. But Mr. Walker's letter, which threatened criminal charges, prompted TRAXCO to act.

"The decision of TRAXCO to remain on government property without a lease will have significant consequences if this continues because, as you are well aware, in the Virgin Islands occupying property, whether public or private, without the permission of the property owner violates the law. For instance, the illegal occupation of another's property could lead to criminal trespass charges, pursuant to Title 14 Virgin Islands Code § 1741(a)," [wrote](#) Mr. Walker.

At a February Committee on Culture, Youth and Recreation hearing at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Hall, F.H.A. attorney Kye Walker, along with horse owner and trainer Randal Knight, contended that TRAXCO had failed to fulfill its obligations, part of which included maintenance of the racing facility, including stable, the racetrack itself, and all other aspects thereof.

According to Mr. Knight, the horsemen maintain the stable with their own funds. He said James Bates of Bates Trucking and Removal, a horseman himself, has used his company's equipment — free of charge — to help the horsemen maintain their stalls; work the agreement expressly states should be performed by TRAXCO. He also took pains to explain the other expenses associated with horse ownership, and told senators that for a horseman with four horses, the expenses average around \$1,200 monthly.

And he said horsemen were being forced to accept reduced purses — all this while TRAXCO had failed to install new slot machines that would help the horsemen make extra money. As of February, 2016, no new slot machines had been installed at the racing facility aside from the initial 32.

TRAXCO's decision to leave could pave the way for new management at the racetrack, and it opens a path for Governor Kenneth Mapp to move forward with his plans to revamp the facility.

"By increasing the hotel occupancy tax, the Legislature is now providing at least \$1 million for the promotion of sports tourism related activities," Mr. Mapp wrote in a

transmittal letter to Mr. James in October, 2015 following the signing of a [hotel occupancy bill into law](#). “We will make the Virgin Islands the center of horse racing in the Caribbean, and we will expand our Paradise Jam basketball tournaments by offering monetary prizes to the winning men’s and women’s teams.”

Mr. Mapp has long held plans to bolster this island by reinvigorating its tourism product, and has singled out horse racing as one of the main attractions.

Speaking during a wide-ranging radio interview with popular personality Mario Moorehead in April of last year, the governor said his administration was in the process of leasing the territory’s horse racing facilities to a horse racing track operator from the US mainland, which includes “a complete reconstruction and build out” of both the St. Croix and St. Thomas facilities,” a move that will provide much-needed jobs for those involved in the local horse racing industry, according to the territory’s leader.

“In terms of driving visitation and tourism on St. Croix, we’re beginning this whole process of sports and events tourism, so you’re going to hear an announcement soon where we’re going to be leveraging our horse racing facilities out to a horse track operator/owner,” Mr. Mapp said.

The governor also made known that in the contract, the government has committed to spending \$500,000 annually over the next ten years for sponsoring ten major purses on the St. Croix and St. Thomas tracks.

However, although St. Thomas is included in the racing and events tourism layout that Mapp and his team have set forth, the focal point of said strategy will be St. Croix, he said, asserting that the island’s geographical arrangement lends itself to the industry.

“The whole objective of this process is to really become the center of racing in this region, and give folks an incentive to grow and get into the racing industry in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and to have others from outside travel to the islands for the purposes of racing,” Mr. Mapp said. “And clearly, given the amount of land and the way St. Croix is situated, we agree with Sen. Neville James that St. Croix should be the centerpiece of this particular strategy.”

In relation to funding for the reconstruction of the facilities’ infrastructure, which Mr. Mapp said will cost millions of dollars, the company that’s contracted will use its own capital, the governor confirmed.

And relative to the use of illegal drugs during events, Mr. Mapp said there will be rigorous enforcement of the law against such activities, because “our whole plan is to drive that now as a segment of the [tourism] industry within the territory.”

Following the successful implementation of the horse racing project, the governor said a new facility will be built on St. Croix to accommodate drag racing, which would further the events tourism sector on the island.