

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Anti-Doping And Single Commission Horse Racing Bills Overcome First Hurdle

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Two bills related to the horse racing industry in the territory were acted upon favorably and will head to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, after senators who make up the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture, chaired by Senator Neville James, generally agreed with the contents of the bills.

They were encouraged in their support of the measures by a host of testifiers, they too agreeing with the bills, although some called for more review before the legislation could become law.

[Bill No. 32-0092](#), seeks to establish a single horse racing commission in the territory, as compared to the current setup that sees St. Thomas and St. Croix having separate commissions. The bill was introduced to the Senate along the "The Virgin Islands Horse Racing Industry Assistance Act of 2016", the landmark agreement ratified last year with local casino operator VIGL Operations, LLC, to revitalize the territory's horse racing industry, a deal with about \$30 million.

Yesterday, however, it was scarcely discussed, with senators instead choosing to concentrate on [Bill No. 32-0093](#), which introduces anti-doping laws to the local industry.

In a release issued early May, Mr. Mapp complained that lawmakers were dragging their feet on addressing the anti-doping problem, adding that the \$30 million deal was in jeopardy because of senators' plodding.

"Today, I am disappointed that I must tell you that the delay in completing our contractual obligations caused by a lack of timely action of the Legislature is putting this \$30 million private investment in jeopardy," Mr. Mapp [wrote in his letter](#) to Senate President Myron Jackson. "In short, we may lose this deal because we are not fulfilling our end of the agreement to provide a statutory environment for clean, transparent and legal horse racing...Who would invest \$30 million in racing facilities in a jurisdiction that would permit and, by your deletion, promote the doping of horses with illegal substances to enhance the horse's performance?"

Yesterday, however, Mr. James said he'd spoken with VIGL officials, who insisted that the deal was not in jeopardy.

On the matter of anti-doping, testifies were united on its importance. Language included in the measure aims to end the practice, including putting a stop to the importation of horses that are banned in the U.S. for a variety of reasons, among them doping and medical; a ban on the practice of reusing syringes, and a ban on the use of devices used to shock and jolt horses into performing. An example of such devices is an electric battery.

While those changes were viewed as non-substantive by some, for testifiers like attorney Terri Griffiths and Attorney General Claude Walker, such language served as additional safeguards to an industry that has suffered from doping.

"Doping and the indiscriminate or inappropriate use of medications are detrimental not only to the integrity of the sport but also to the health, welfare, and safety of the racehorses, who cannot refuse such maltreatment, and the jockeys who ride them," said Ms. Griffiths, who drafted the first anti-doping measure on behalf of the Mapp administration.

"If the USVI does not implement anti-doping regulation, we will not attract stateside competitors. The casino development is attractive because it should provide an additional tourism product via the improvement of the horse racing industry. Standing alone – neither slot machines or VLT gambling is going to attract new tourism dollars. Without anti-doping regulation, the stateside horse racing industry visitors will not come," she added.

"The widespread use of performance-enhancing drugs in horses threatens the viability, safety and integrity of the sport, especially the threat to the safety and well-being of the jockey," said Mr. Walker in his testimony. He later added, "Aside from the health and safety of the horses, there remains the issue of the public's perception of a sport that routinely uses drugs as a tool to gain a competitive edge."

Other testifiers included Dept. of Agriculture (D.O.A) Commissioner Carlos Robles, Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation Commissioner Pedro Cruz, Deputy Attorney General Joseph Ponteen, attorney Geoffrey Eaton from the firm of Winston & Strawn, which was hired by the government as a negotiator when the VIGL deal was being formed, and D.O.A.'s director of veterinary services, Bethany Bradford.

If the bills survive the Committee of Rules and Judiciary, they will be then voted on by the full body during a Senate session. If they survive the session, they will be forwarded to Mr. Mapp.

Correction: June 16, 2017

A previous version of this story incorrectly mentioned Senator Jean Forde as the chairman of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture. The chairman is Neville James. We've updated the story to reflect the correct information.