

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Open Letter To Gov. Albert Bryan: Horseracing And Development Of Clinton Phipps Racetrack On St. Thomas

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Staff **July 08, 2019**



Dear Governor Bryan:

We write to you to express our concern and to seek resolution of the problem of the status of horseracing and the development of the Clinton Phipps Racetrack on St. Thomas.

In 2015, there was talk of having a new, upgraded racetrack in St. Thomas. We saw certain people coming out of meetings with some horse owners and others. Then, we

heard former Governor Kenneth Mapp announce that he made a deal with a group to run our racetrack in 2016 and on December 1 of that year, the Legislature passed the deal. It was unlike any other horseracing bill or measure previously passed, as all of the Horseracing Commission members on St. Thomas/St. John said Governor Mapp never spoke to them. They knew nothing about the deal and was not involved in any discussions or negotiations regarding the bill that created the deal.

Promises were made that we would get a new racing surface and the distance of the track would be expanded so it could be recognized nationally. To date, there has been no expansion. We submitted a letter to former Governor Mapp questioning the logic of some of what we heard. That letter was cast aside by him with the directive that we talk to the Senators. We heard about a group of people Governor Mapp and Randy Knight brought in and paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to tell us about “doping” and how it had to stop in order for us to have “world-class racing” here.

Our group submitted written comments on the “anti-doping measure,” informing the powers that be that we are not drug dealers and our horses are not addicts or users. We even sent one of our members to St. Croix to give written and oral testimony. Our comments were ignored and the bill was passed without regard to our position.

It is now more than three years since what was described above took place and we are ‘stuck in the sand’ or as Addie says, “Up a creek without a paddle.” We have had no races in St. Thomas since August of 2017. Tortola’s racetrack was damaged by a storm when some of our horses was there for their August 2017 Carnival races and we returned home without running. Their track was further damaged by the same two hurricanes that hit us in September 2017. Nonetheless, Tortola has been having horseraces, thanks largely to us shipping our horses up there to race, but not without problems.

Two months ago, some of our horses and their caretakers were stranded in Tortola for almost two weeks before we could get them back to St. Thomas. Our USVI government-owned starting gate has been in Tortola for all of 2019. Tortola is running up there with our resources and we can’t run here. They are using our gate and we can’t use it here to train our horses, especially our young, native horses. If we want to use it, we must go to Tortola to race our horses. Something is wrong with this picture and we need you to fix it, Governor.

We can go on and on with the problems we are facing, such as no grandstand and no bathroom facilities (only Porta Potties) at the Clinton Phipps Racetrack. Is this what our Government bargained for? Where is our Horseracing Commission in all of this? Do we have members in this district who care? The BVI doesn’t even have such a body that oversees horseracing in its country, but we are forced to support their cause if we want to continue to be involved and at extravagant costs, to include travel and accommodation expenses. It has gotten so bad that some of our members have sold their horses in frustration and are now raising chickens, planting vegetables and just waiting to see what will happen here on St. Thomas. How long must we wait?

As a progressive place with a government of young, resourceful intellectuals and a community with generations of horseracing people for well over 100 years, we cannot continue to blame the 2017 Hurricanes for the problems we have. VIGL Horse Racing,

which is supposed to be rebuilding our local horseracing tracks, got everything it asked for years ago, but we haven't benefitted yet. We heard that after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, VIGL told the Government to "tear down as part of the deal" our grandstand--although the grandstand only lost some sheets of galvanize--along with all the other existing buildings on the track and dig up all the concrete on the grounds.

Now, where is the development plan? What is the timetable for completion? When these questions are asked, we are told to wait. We need action now!

Three years without our traditional Carnival horseraces is unacceptable. VIGL has made one unfulfilled promise after another and it may be time to Change Course Now!

Submitted by the Nadir Horse Owners and Trainers Association, Inc.

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