

LAWMAKERS UPDATED ON THE STATUS OF V.I. HORSE RACING COMMISSION & THE DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS, PARKS, AND RECREATION

Date : September 27, 2019

St.

Thomas- Members of the Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks and Recreation chaired by Sen. Javan James, Sr., convened in a meeting at the Capitol Building on Friday, to receive testimony on the status of the V.I. Horse Racing Commission and the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR). Lawmakers also voted and approved Bill No. 30-0116 regarding the Horse Racing Commission. All measures approved will be forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration.

Thus

far, the status of the leadership position of Chairman of the [Horse Racing Commission](#) has yet to be determined.

Although the Board voted for Dr. Laura Palminteri to become the new chairperson on August 2019, the votes were challenged by sitting Chairman Jay Watson citing an illegal vote won by a simple majority instead of two-thirds majority; or in legal terms, a violation of the Robert's Rule of Order, adopted by the Commission on February 2019. Presently, legal council is reviewing the matter and is responsible for selecting a chairperson; according to a written document submitted to the Legislature of the Virgin Islands by Dr. Palminteri that was read into the record by Horse Racing Commission Board Member Shane Benjamin.

Defending

his allegations, Watson indicated that the votes were questionable. "The main issue is whether the rules, processes and the laws established for the efficient operation of the Commission were followed and they were not." Sen. James stated that the Horse Racing Commission must resolve internal issues and work as a team for the benefit of the Commission. Similarly, Sen. Violet also expressed disapproval of the lack of leadership in the Commission. "We are going to have to get over this hump by putting egos and personalities aside. If this doesn't work, legislation can be drafted to get rid of everyone and

completely start over,” said Sen. Vialet. “We need to move forward, develop plans, have interim horse races, determine the minimum requirements to hold races so that the Horse Racing Industry can continue to progress.”

Collectively, policymakers questioned the necessary steps to move the Commission forward. Horse Racing Commission Board Member Sheldon Turnbull mentioned that there is a sense of urgency to reinstate horse racing in the Territory by upgrading the infrastructure of the race tracks in both districts by following the standards required for professional horse racing, update anti-doping regulations, and to review policies.

The Department of Sports, Park and Recreation Commissioner Calvert White shared the status on various projects. Currently, there are a total of 61 FEMA Projects throughout the Virgin Islands. The top two projects are the Vincent Mason Pool on St. Croix estimated at \$3.7 million and the Clinton Phipps Racetrack on St. Thomas estimated at \$4.1 million. The Coki Point Beach Project consists of adding rental booths, upgrading the boardwalk and bathroom facilities. Post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria, DSPR invested \$20K to purchase several 1500w bulbs for fields and 1000w for basketball courts. The installation of light bulbs has already begun. DSPR continues to collaborate with private/public partnerships for the progression of public areas under their jurisdiction Territorywide. Some of the things achieved through the partnership include reinstalling damaged benches on St. Thomas, supplying rakes and materials for beach clean-ups on St. Croix, and donating essential furniture for the DSPR Summer Camp on St. John.

Separately, policymakers voted favorably for Bill No. 33-0116-An Act amending Title 32 of the Virgin Islands Code as it relates to the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission. The measure seeks to establish district requirements for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and a due date for the franchise financial obligation. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Vialet.

Senators present are Javan James, Sr.,
Athneil "Bobby" Thomas, Dwayne DeGraff, Alicia Barnes, Myron Jackson, Oakland
Benta, and Steven Payne.

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