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by corey johnsen

HISTORIC MONTH IN KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Equine Education Project will host a rally at the Keeneland Sales Pavilion on Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and Speaker of the House Greg Stumbo will be on hand to address members of the state's signature industry. Earlier in the week, the Senate Appropriations and Revenue Committee voted 10-5 to not send House Bill 2, which authorized VLT's at Kentucky racetracks, to the floor of the Senate for a full vote of the members. So why have a rally after a disappointing defeat?

Because we are not done yet. The Kentucky horse industry has never been more unified. Polls show that the citizens of the Commonwealth are 70 percent in favor of this issue. And the industry has powerful allies in the Governor, Speaker and many other legislative leaders. Let's review some of the achievements during the month of June:

- Gov. Beshear calls for a Special Session with VLT's at the racetracks as part of the call.
- Attorney General Jack Conway releases an opinion that he believes that the VLT issue is on firm constitutional ground.
- Over 1,000 industry members attend a rally on the steps of the State Capitol and are addressed by Gov. Beshear and the First Lady.
- House Bill 2, which authorizes VLT's at racetracks, passes the House by a vote of 52-45.
- House Bill 2 is heard in the Senate A & R Committee, which votes 10-5 to not send it to the Senate.

Don't be totally discouraged by the last item. You might wonder why I consider it an achievement. We have been waiting for a bill to clear the House and be sent to the Senate, so the industry can separate fact from fiction. Who are the real supporters of the Kentucky horse industry? Who are the pretenders? Now, we know. That is a major achievement.

Also, please be aware of the biased party makeup of the Senate A & R Committee. By their own rules, Senate committees are supposed to be representative of the party breakdowns, which means there should have been 42 percent Democrats in that committee. The actual breakdown by party in that committee is 11 Republicans, five Democrats and one Independent (who voted with the Republicans). Five Democrats out of 16 members is not close to 42 percent.

I believe that if Senate President David Williams had sent HB 2 to any other relevant Senate committee, it would have passed and been sent on to the floor. President Williams stated many times that he would give a bill like this a fair hearing. He did not do that, and the Kentucky horse industry won't forget it.

I have been through this before. I have never been more depressed than in 2003, when an important piece of legislation in Oklahoma was bottled up late in the session and was not voted on in the House after passing the Senate. After feeling sorry for myself for a few days, we all got back on our horses (excuse the pun) and went to work again. The industry came together as an even stronger coalition. Public opinion continued to grow in our favor. And, in the first month of the 2004 session, a bill was passed that literally saved the Oklahoma horse racing and breeding industries. Remington Park just finished a record breaking spring season, to illustrate that point.

We will do the same thing in Kentucky. After the defeat in the Senate A & R committee, I am more convinced than ever that this bill will pass. Senator Tim Shaughnessy, a member of the A & R Committee who voted with the horse industry, said, "It is not if this bill will pass, but when."

Wednesday's rally at Keeneland will remind everyone that our work is not over. Also, it will recognize the hard work of dedicated legislators and literally thousands of industry members who generated an unprecedented amount of emails and phone calls to the Capitol. One Senator showed a four-inch binder full of copies of emails, and stated that this was only part of those she received.

What can you do as we prepare for another chance with the Kentucky legislature? Join the Kentucky Equine Education Project (KEEP), and stay tuned to their website, horseswork.com. That organization will provide us with direction as to how best we can influence the process. And, as former Gov. Brereton Jones says, "Stay together. If we stay unified, they won't beat us." **Comments for publication? Please email [TDN management at suefinley@thoroughbreddailynews.com](mailto:suefinley@thoroughbreddailynews.com).**