



op/ed

by craig bandoroff

WHY DID THE SLOTS BILL DIE IN COMMITTEE?

I wish I could tell you the answer to that question. There is only one thing I can definitively tell you: it was not from a lack of effort from some very talented and hard-working people who put their heart and soul into this. Anyone who wants to criticize or finger-point is making a mistake. I can tell you this didn't die in committee because of anything anyone did wrong. People like Governor Steve Beshear; House Speaker Greg Stumbo; Representative Susan Westrom; lobbyists like Gene McLean, John Cooper, Smitty Taylor, David Switzer and Judy Taylor; Nick Nicholson; Brereton Jones; and Bill Hoskins and the KEEP team, led by an extremely capable and smart Patrick Neely; gave it every ounce of fight they had.

I'd love to tell you that it died in committee because Republican senators and one Independent voted not to send it to the full Senate for a vote because that's what their conscience, heart or constituents told them to do. I have my doubts. Before I express my theory, let me explain my position on the vote.

Many of you reading this are neither from, nor live in, Kentucky. Although my wife and I have lived here for the past 23 years and my three children were born and raised here, I am not a native Kentuckian. So perhaps my perspective is clouded. I've come to learn that Kentucky is politically two separate states. The more cosmopolitan and liberal areas of Lexington and Central Kentucky, Louisville and surrounding counties, and Northern Kentucky in proximity to Cincinnati are offset by the conservative, rural regions of Eastern, Western and Southern Kentucky. You couldn't have two more divergent groups in political and ideological thinking. The latter is conservative, religious and very Bible-belt oriented.

The point of this geopolitical lesson is to help you understand why this is a very tough vote for these legislators. Many of their constituents are vehemently and morally opposed to expanded gambling. Do they represent the majority? It's hard for me to say. But, for me, the issue was not whether or not this committee should decide the fate of this issue, but whether they should agree to let this issue be heard by everyone's elected representative. In my mind, the issue was too important to the major industry and to the economic engine of the state for it to be decided by a committee of senators comprised of 11 Republicans, five Democrats and one Independent.

The vote went along party lines, with the exception of one Republican senator, Tom Buford, who voted yes (one Republican was absent, and one Democrat abstained) and fell in line with the demands of their dogmatic and powerful leader, David Williams. I could use many adjectives to describe my feelings and opinion of Mr. Williams. None would be complimentary, nor would they include 'stupid.' He is very smart, and a master politician.

I am not politically savvy enough to understand where Williams's power comes from, but it is evident. He works hard at not getting along with his Democratic counterparts and rules his party with an iron fist. His hypnotic power is so great, he convinced his fellow Republican senators that his proposed plan to help the horse industry was credible. In fact, it wasn't worth the paper it was written on, as everyone in this industry knows.

Gambling Economics 101, senator: when you raise the takeout, people gamble less.

Legislation 101, senator: when you tell states that your takeout rate will exceed the amount that their statute says they can pay, they can't bet on your races.

Hard as everyone tried, our explanations fell on deaf ears. And trust me--we tried, we begged, we pleaded. But, at the end of the day, when the fix is in, you ain't gonna win.

I'm still not sure why these 10 senators refused to let this issue be heard by everyone and to let every citizen's elected representative have their say. The results of their vote on this issue will effectively kill their racing industry and strike a severe and hurtful blow to their breeding industry. We all know that the latter is arguably one of the finest in the world.

Their decision pains me as a citizen of this great country, whose principles are founded on freedom. I'm proud to be an American. I can't say I'm proud to be a Kentuckian today. Their actions are a poor reflection on the political process and upon themselves. Had they voted 'no' on the full Senate floor, I'd have disagreed with their vote, but I would respect their decision. As I said, it's a tough vote and a tough issue. But I cannot accept killing it in committee as being prudent or responsible.

So why did it die in committee? I'm certainly not politically savvy enough to know. But if you want to start looking, I'd start with the Senate president and his cronies on the Appropriations and Revenue Committee, led by Senator Charlie Borders. Perhaps their actions will lead to a groundswell of support which results in a throw-the-bums-out movement. As one of those who worked very hard to get this legislation passed the right way, I hope it will. We're tired, we're discouraged, but I hope we are not done. Maybe it will all be too late when it finally reaches the full legislature for a vote. But I hope one day, all of the people of Kentucky will be represented on an issue so important to their state and to the lives of 100,000 people the horse industry supports.

All European post times in the TDN are local time

So to all of us who will suffer from their actions, I'm sorry. To all of us who worked so hard for so long, I'm sorry. I'm reminded of two sayings I've heard about politics. Winston Churchill said, "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." The other quip: you don't ever want to witness two things being made--sausage, and legislation. I've never seen the former, and, having witnessed the latter, I'd have to agree.

Craig Bendoroff is the owner of Denali Stud near Paris, Kentucky.

Comments for publication? Please email TDN management at suefinley@thoroughbreddailynews.com.