



# op/ed

by barry irwin

## KEEP IN MIND

Patrick Neely ([Thoroughbred Daily News](#), July 9) took to task Arthur Hancock for a previous Op-Ed ([Alternative to Slots](#), July 2) on behalf of KEEP, an organization for which he works.

The focus should not be on Mr. Hancock, but on KEEP, its founders and leaders, and on the Democrats in Kentucky led by the governor.

What is KEEP?

Here is what Mr. Neely wrote. "KEEP works hard to represent and unite all aspects of the equine industry. People involved with various breeds--Standardbreds, Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses and Tennessee Walking horses--jockeys, equine attorneys, track owners and others are each represented on its board of directors. KEEP's grassroots committee uses educational outreach, communicates with members and funds local equine events in all 120 Kentucky counties to make sure everyone across the Commonwealth knows that 'Horses Work for Kentucky.'"

Here is the Mission Statement from KEEP's website: "To increase awareness of the benefits of Kentucky's horse economy and to promote jobs in economic opportunities for Kentuckians through the Commonwealth's world-class horse industry."

What Mr. Neely did not say, and what nobody at KEEP ever says, is that KEEP was formed by Thoroughbred industry members led by former Governor Brereton C. Jones, staffed with his political cronies and set up as a political action committee with the sole purpose of promoting the introduction and proliferation of alternative gaming at Kentucky racetracks.

In order to make it seem less crass and obvious, KEEP was designed to incorporate other breeds and industry elements in order to make it seem that the Thoroughbred industry enjoyed wide support from the entire equine community in the State of Kentucky. Should slots become a reality in the Commonwealth, KEEP has promised the other breeds a share of the financial rewards.

KEEP and its leaders, instead of being honest and setting up an organization to be up front about its intentions, went to considerable effort to create a facade that basically became unhinged prior to the last gubernatorial election. KEEP was down for the count and its members and staff became demoralized.

Then the group picked itself up and decided their best ticket to get slots was to elect Steve Beshear as governor. Beshear duly won the election, with considerable help from KEEP.

Decisions were made and tactics employed by the Governor to bring to a vote in a Senate committee the prospects for alternative gaming to become legal in the Commonwealth. The committee, led by Senate President David Williams, voted down the proposal to legalize slots by a margin of 10 to 5.

Angry because they had been stymied in committee, KEEP and its leaders struck out. They attacked the industry's best friend, Republican State Senator Damon Thayer. Lynch mobs were formed to root out the cause of this evil decision by identifying Republican senators that could be campaigned against when they tried to run for office again.

The real problem KEEP has is that it has failed to achieve its goal and former Governor Jones has been unable to use his considerable political gifts well enough to persuade the opposition that slots were the way to go.

KEEP and former Governor Jones need to be introspective, patient and wise. They need to step back, take a long look at their tactics and see why they failed. Then they need a new, more transparent game plan.

Former Governor Jones should be well aware that in politics, all elected officials are the same under their thin skin. If they see a group like KEEP going after Republicans in office, Democrats, too, become nervous. If they see a friend of racing being vilified like Senator Thayer, they really get nervous.

In politics, the Thoroughbred industry cannot afford to pick sides. They must embrace all politicians. That is the way it works.

KEEP should stop trying to lay blame elsewhere and cannibalize people like Mr. Hancock and Senator Thayer. They propped up a storefront, formulated a game plan, they failed to execute it and the blame, if there is any, falls directly on them.

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