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November 18, 2009

***An open letter to the horse racing community
from John L. Blakney***

**Race Dates:
Be a Part of the Search for Concepts and Ideas – Send us your
input**

ORC Board initiates Moratorium and orders examination of Race Dates

As you know, there is now a moratorium in place on any race date reductions. The Board of the Ontario Racing Commission (ORC), on its own initiative, ordered this move for very deliberate reasons. In the face of significant reductions requested by racetracks for 2010, combined with the annual declines in race days since 2006, the Board recognized this downward trend needed to be investigated.

The Board has directed the Executive Director to work with the industry. The task includes: an examination and evaluation of the impact of such reductions; the development of a new approach to determining race dates which can better serve the interests of Ontario horse racing and the public; and the identification of what that model might be.

That is the purpose of this communication.

As Executive Director, I invite you to send in your ideas and to be a part of this collaborative effort. A great deal of effort will be required, as this will clearly be a challenging, and some may say, daunting task. For one thing, any discussion and formulation of a 'better way' for determining race dates must take into account a number of perspectives:

- Provide sufficient racing opportunities to support a sustainable racehorse supply;
- Offer a reasonable rate of return for the businesses which showcase racing;
- Deliver a quality product that is attractive to the customer;
- Provide a principle-based framework for moving forward and to grant some certainty of the future.

The Consultation Process

A preliminary consultation process is now underway. In the coming weeks, I will be meeting with representatives of the various sectors of the racing community and will do so equally and fairly. I will meet with these members of the community – horse people groups, racetracks, and breeders – to explore new and innovative concepts.

You can be a part of this exercise. I invite you to submit your ideas now, either through your association or directly through the ORC web site.

I can assure you that this analysis and discussion within the consultation will take place in a transparent, open and inclusive way. As well, it will be undertaken in a timely and expeditious manner.

The ORC Board has indicated the moratorium is a temporary measure and will remain in place pending completion of this evaluation. But how much time will the analysis take, and will it be concluded by allocation time for the 2011 season?

That will be up to the participants.

Collaboration and Consideration of the other's point of view

I invite all who intend to participate in this dialogue to think and act in the most collaborative way, with due consideration of the other's point of view.

A review of racing discussion boards – about the fate of racing generally, and the allocation of race dates specifically – reveals that there are varying opinions held among members of the racing community. Some views are particularly pessimistic, predicting the demise of racing and that business will be doomed.

If there is anything 'positive' in this rather negative dialogue, it is that in many cases the commentators go on to say that ***the status quo is no longer an option***.... that we need to ***think globally***... and that now is the time to ***come together and work for the betterment*** of our industry.

I take that to mean there must be a better way – a better way to allocate race dates while aligning supply and demand for live racing. I believe it also means we can improve the manner in which our respective groups work together.

We want your ideas

This is a time for innovative thinking. For this process to work, we need new concepts and ideas on the allocation of race dates. I challenge all those who care about horse racing – whether that concern is based on a lifetime of experience or the impressions of a new participant – to think creatively, and submit some specific ideas for change.

For example, you might try to make at least **one suggestion** that differs from the 'existing' position you (or the organization, company you represent) typically makes. This will not be an easy task but one that can lead to a resolution and a positive outcome ... if the participants contribute honestly to this effort.

It is clear that the selection of race dates is a complex issue, and one that needs thoughtful deliberation.

Some suggestions have already been made on discussions boards. The collaborative effort will be challenged to work through these suggestions and many others.

What is your new idea?

For example, some have suggested that all participants should come together to work out what is best for the industry as a whole. With this approach, all dates would be developed in conjunction with each other.

Others believe more circuit racing over a shorter period of time would generate more excitement and interest.

Still others advocate for a true demand driven and supply managed approach to establishing the most market effective and efficient race date schedule for Ontario racing.

What do you think?

Next Steps

This is an important point in the history of horse racing in Ontario. I hope all those who care about this community will respond with the best, most open minded ideas. I am committed to do what I can to make the process of collaboration work.

Please watch for more information in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John L. Blakney", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John L. Blakney
Executive Director

Send your input to the ORC by November 30, 2009 as follows:

Through the ORC website at www.ontarioracingcommission.ca
and use the "Opportunity for Input" form

By Email: inquiry@ontarioracingcommission.ca

By Fax: (416) 213-7827