

<http://www.saratogian.com/articles/2010/02/21/opinion/doc4b80ad17e1ce1941631721.txt?viewmode=fullstory>

## Letter: A call to action on Aqueduct VLTs

Published: Sunday, February 21, 2010

Dear Gov. Paterson,

We write as elected leaders of Saratoga Springs, both Republicans and Democrats, to ask that the recently announced Aqueduct gaming agreement be brought to fruition as soon as possible. The years of delays and false starts have cost New York state taxpayers billions in revenue, and have cast a pall of uncertainty over the thoroughbred racing and breeding industry, which produces more than \$200 million each year in jobs and economic benefit to the Saratoga-Capital Region, in addition to sales tax, pari-mutuel tax and other revenues for New York state.

As chief steward of the state's economic well-being, along with the leaders of the Senate and Assembly, you know as well as anyone that our fiscal condition does not allow us to forego available revenue any more than we can afford to spend recklessly on wasteful projects.

The VLT casino at Aqueduct is conservatively estimated to be capable of producing at least \$300 million a year for the state. At the same time, the support agreed to for the racing industry from the VLTs will spur added private investment in training and breeding that will multiply itself in both state and local tax receipts, jobs and farmland preservation.

Of course, our sense of urgency is focused on this issue because of our own community's stake in this matter. To Saratoga Springs, the thoroughbred racing season is our economic lifeblood and our internationally known brand. As we write, our citizens are again concerned that a curtailment of our racing meet could result from any undue delay in implementing the Aqueduct agreement. Some trainers and breeders have already exported their operations to other states while they see what will happen in New York.

Warning signs abound.

The last time racing was cancelled in Saratoga Springs was during World War II, and it took decades for our community to recover. This time, damage from a loss of racing would be regional and statewide in effect and a recovery might never come.

Thoroughbred racing is more than entertainment for race fans. It preserves farmland and historic resources, employs thousands and produces revenue for state and local governments.

Without exaggeration, the fate of New York racing and its dependent communities hangs in the balance. Ours is a call to action, to confirm priorities in these most critical of economic times. New York's premiere stature in racing and ability to remain economically competitive must not be second place to politics.

In a bipartisan spirit, we offer our time and counsel to you or anyone else who is in a position to now finalize this overdue agreement, with due regard for the requirements of law.

Thank you for your anticipated attention and reaction on these pivotal issues. We trust you also recognize the urgency to take immediate action.

Very truly yours,

Scott T. Johnson, Mayor

John P. Franck, Commissioner of Accounts

City of Saratoga Springs