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**JOHNSON TAKES LEAD FOR CITY, PUBLICLY SUPPORTS NYRA**

*Mayoral Candidate will also lead a petition drive for residents and concerned citizens*

Scott Johnson, the Republican candidate for Mayor of Saratoga Springs, has announced today that he is publicly supporting the New York Racing Association in its bid to retain the racing franchise in New York. NYRA, which currently runs Saratoga Racecourse, Aqueduct and Belmont, is one of four competitors bidding to run the three racetracks.

“It has become clear that our current Mayor and the other Democratic candidate lack the leadership to take a stand on this issue,” said Johnson. “How can someone who feels that they can lead this great City take a backseat to this process, simply sitting on their hands and hoping for the best? Recently, we have been a rudderless ship, with no discernable direction. As your next Mayor, you will always know where I stand, especially on issues of this magnitude. We need, and deserve, strong leadership to make sure Saratoga Springs is headed in the right direction. That is the type of leadership that I bring to the table.

This is a decision that impacts our City more than anything. After following the issue for several years, hearing from experts and the public last week at our Town Hall meeting, and conducting my own research, I feel that allowing NYRA to continue to run racing would be best for Saratoga Springs. Since they took over the tracks, the quality of horseracing has always come first and that is why our City has been able to flourish and prosper more than any other community with thoroughbred racing.”

For the past several decades, NYRA has made a clear effort to preserve both the architectural and cultural traditions of the racetrack. Whereas other tracks have installed luxury skyboxes, increased admission costs to drive out the average trackgoer, or let the quality of racing decline to increase their bottom line, NYRA has respected the track like any citizen of the City would. However, the decision is in the hands of the state, as a recommendation is to be made by September 4<sup>th</sup>.

The franchise decision goes far beyond the legitimate issues of preservation of the track and the quality of racing. The economic impact, both direct and indirect, of this racing meet on our community cannot be underestimated, as measured in excess of \$213,000,000 per year. Indeed, the economic vitality and sustainability of our local economy is tied at the hip with the track continuing its tradition of world class racing.

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“To show that I am not all talk, I am going to lead a petition drive, beginning this weekend, collecting signatures from people who agree with my assertion that NYRA has the right tools in place to run racing in Saratoga Springs,” added Johnson. “I hope that everyone who feels as strongly about this as I do signs our petition so we can show Governor Spitzer and the State Legislature what the residents of Saratoga want.

This petition drive is just another example of the new Republican Party in Saratoga Springs. My fellow Republican candidates and I are here to listen to the people, bring their ideas to the table, and most importantly, lead this City in the right direction.”

The Racecourse, which was called one of the top ten sports venues in the nation by *Sports Illustrated*, has remained relatively unchanged over the years, unlike tracks in Florida, Kentucky or California. NYRA has only made small improvements that make the experience better for the horse enthusiast and bettor, while at the same time balancing over 140 years of tradition. When someone walks through the gate here, they may easily think they were whisked back to 1864, the year the track first opened. It is that sense of history and tradition that helps to make the track so special.

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