

## **Illinois racing industry stunned at failure of expanded gaming bill**

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**by Neil Milbert**

Fueled by a sense of outrage following the Illinois General Assembly's failure to enact legislation that would have permitted slot machines at racetracks, members of the Illinois racing industry have vowed to continue their concerted push for expanded gaming at the spring session.

"The treachery involved with regard to racing legislation is beyond comprehension," charged Illinois Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association president Mike Campbell. "We were promised by senior leadership [in the legislature] if we could reach consensus as an industry they would address our problems. The whole industry is on the brink of disaster because of their failure to recognize agri-business needs. Our reaction is one of total loss, total disappointment and total anger.

"The ITHA is not going to give up; the racetracks are not going to give up; the harness horsemen are not going to give up. We're going to reorganize. They haven't seen tough until we come back in the spring (when the General Assembly reconvenes in Springfield). If I have to ride a horse through the capital building I will do that if this is what it takes to get these people to understand what we need to survive."

Representative Lou Lang (D-Skokie), who sponsored the bill that was approved by the House Executive Committee by an 8-3 vote on January 5, bore the brunt of the rage because he declined to ask that it be called for a vote before House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) adjourned the veto session.

"He led us astray," asserted Hawthorne president Tim Carey. "He should be ashamed of himself for doing what he did not only to the racing industry but also to union members who need jobs and everyone associated with this bill. Every single union was on board for a bill that would have brought in \$1-billion a year in revenue for the state and created 20,000 new jobs.

"He took us to the altar and then left the church."

The state Senate had earlier approved a bill that would have permitted five new casinos in Illinois, including one in Chicago, and provided additional gaming positions at the state's 10 currently-licensed casinos in addition to letting the state's five operating racetracks and the defunct harness track Quad City Downs install a total of 6,300 slot machines.

When members of the racing industry went to the final session of the House of Representatives January 11 they were confident that it would be approved there

and then the Senate would add finishing touches and send it to Governor Pat Quinn for his signature.

Carey, Campbell, and Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association executive director Anthony Somone all said that as late as 6 p.m. CST they had received assurances that 65 House members would vote "yes," five more than the bare minimum needed for passage.

A few hours earlier in the afternoon Lang dropped in on their caucus and, according to Campbell, "gave us every assurance the bill was going to be called."

"I'm just as mad at Lou Lang as the racing people are," said Senator Terry Link (D-Lake Bluff), sponsor of the Senate bill. "I am so livid. I said things I never do. If my mother were still alive, she'd be washing my mouth out with soap.

"Before I went on the floor that night one of the representatives from my district called and said: 'It's going to be called right after the income tax bill.' I was on the floor 45 minutes before I found out it hadn't been called and I went ballistic."

Members of the racing industry coalition that had been holding daily meetings in Springfield with its 38 lobbyists in the two weeks prior to the conclusion of the veto session were both stunned and outraged when the session was adjourned immediately after the income tax bill was passed by the House.

"Everyone in the racing industry had their jaws opened and then drop to the floor when Mike Madigan adjourned the session," Carey said. "We had the votes. [Senate president] John Cullerton (D-Chicago) was actually calling House members to make sure they were voting for it. He wanted the bill back in the Senate so he could put it on the governor's desk."

Senator Link agreed. "Everything was set," he said. "The only person who kept this from passing was Lou Lang, the sponsor of the House bill."

Lang did not return phone calls asking for an explanation, but Carey offered one.

"He stated that the reason he didn't call the bill was because he got a call from the governor. In fact, he didn't get a call, and then he said he interpreted it that the governor would have vetoed it. I question why he didn't call it. He chickened out. There's got to be something awry."

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