



From the EXECUTIVE CORNER



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CTBA LOBBYIST

We've Come a Long Way Baby

The year was 1978, and the world would not see another Triple Crown winner after Affirmed for an astounding 37 years. Loretta Lynn's new album that year, "We've Come a Long Way Baby," could have described horse racing, which enjoyed both celebrity status as well as tracks filled with fans waiting to bet on the fastest horses.

Although many great horses, trainers, and jockeys have come along during the past 37 years, racing has seen its handle decline and our political clout diminish as our fans have grown older and the competition swelled beyond imagination.

Californians passed Proposition 1A, which allowed for class III gaming on tribal lands, and since then the state's racing industry has experienced an unprecedented 45% decline in racing revenue. Sadly, racing's once great stature in the legislature began to fade as good friends passed away or were forced out by the state's term limit laws.

But we're fighting back. We fought to get Internet wagering in 2001, which has seen steady growth over the years. We fought for additions to the breeders, owners, and stallion incentives and awards programs, and we've won many

small battles along the way that have kept us in the game.

For the past six years we have fought one of the biggest battles in the Capitol, the fight for Internet poker. Six years ago the only discussion for racing was the possibility of a minuscule revenue stream from the state's general fund, with no guarantees that the fund would last beyond the next legislature. Passage of an Internet poker bill allowing for licensure for only tribal governments and card rooms would certainly devastate the racing industry in California.

Just as the lyrics in Lynn's song said, "Second class don't turn me on at all," and likewise racing has fought back, regaining much of the stature we once enjoyed with decision-makers in the Capitol. Much to the surprise of many who expected to see racing settle for second-class status, we have fought hard to let folks know we are equally entitled under the law to obtain a license and offer Internet poker.

We have worked to educate legislators about the history and economic importance of the Thoroughbred industry and the 50,000 Californians who make their living from these magnificent athletes. We have debated the legal arguments with articulate passion, and we have

come a long way in six years.

The battle for Internet poker is not over, but at least most understand racing arguments for inclusion. The legislature returns on Aug. 17 to begin its work before adjourning for the year in September. There is a great deal of effort to pass one of the two remaining poker bills this session. Assemblyman Mike Gatto's bill, which excluded racing, was pulled by the author in June in the recognition that the opposition was too great. Assemblyman Adam Gray's bill and Rep. Reggie Jones-Sawyer's bill, both of which we support, may move in August.

Holding every bill that excludes racing from offering Internet poker has been a huge victory because no bill is better than a bill that would negatively impact our industry. This comes at a time when American Pharoah's magnificent Triple Crown achievement has garnered even more respect for the industry, as he, trainer Bob Baffert, and jockey Victor Espinoza make Southern California their home.

The coalition to pass an Internet poker bill that includes racing is the broadest and biggest coalition on the issue in California. We're not there yet, but we've come a long way baby. **CTB**