

Divide and Conquer

Let's see: *Who is it that might want California Thoroughbred owners' interests fragmented, rather than united and advancing owners' causes through a single, strong, effective voice?*

Could it possibly be a certain track operator and/or one ADW company, both of whom are represented by one political consultant who – while meeting in early Spring to discuss the industry's effort to pass Instant Racing legislation – threatened that if TOC did not stop its efforts to evaluate future racing venues and opportunities, as well as a better revenue split between owners and that certain ADW company, there would be untold consequences, as they had “a plan to deal with TOC”?

Could TOC's refusal to accept the “net deal” revenue split – which actually guaranteed nothing to purses – proposed by that track interest in its version of the Instant Racing bill have contributed to the effort to weaken TOC?

Why were only lobbyists hired by – or in business with – the principals of Bay Meadows Land Company, Bay Meadows and Hollywood Park racetracks, and Stockbridge Capital – parent company of the foregoing – active in the introduction and support of a bill to split representation of Northern and Southern Thoroughbred owners?

Why did nearly every other California racing industry interest – the CTBA, Oak Tree, Del Mar, Santa Anita, Golden Gate Fields, Fairplex, CARE, Youbet, and Xpressbet – vehemently oppose this thinly veiled effort to retaliate against TOC for its legitimate and well-intentioned efforts to work with the balance of the industry, and to protect owners' short and long-term investment in California racing?

While no one will question the motives of certain horsemen in the North concerned about what they perceive as a lack of representation within TOC, we do ask them to objectively consider why a certain track and its president would personally ask them to sign a petition calling for a split of their representation, without any of those horsemen first contacting their local TOC Board members or TOC staff about their concerns. It's a sad fact, but not once before the bill to split TOC was introduced did anyone associated with the petition contact TOC about any such grievance or concerns. Anyone who suggests otherwise is mistaken, or worse.

Honestly, what I personally fear is that those who were asked to sign the petition were not fully informed of the potential severe negative impacts such a split would have on horsemen in the North, and the viability of Northern California racing in general. For example, were there two organizations – and purse and program revenues derived within a zone kept within that zone – subsidized workers compensation rates in Northern California would be about two to three times higher than they are in the South, rather than half as much, as they are this year. Why? Because a substantial percentage of program funds derived in the South were used to help stabilize a more precarious situation in the North, in the hopes of helping racing throughout the State, rather than exclusively within one region.

The decision to allocate workers compensation subsidy funding in this manner was made long before any petition suggesting a lack of representation or interest in the North ever surfaced. No, it was made by TOC and CTT leadership because of their concerns for and awareness of dire conditions in the North, and from a genuine desire to see them improve.

Though TOC is not a perfect organization – as no such organization exists – we are extremely responsive to our members' inquiries and needs, and employ a small staff that makes itself available nearly 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We are constantly soliciting member input and suggestions as to how the organization can better serve owners, and take quite seriously the comments and concerns our members share with us. TOC is, after all, a representative service organization dedicated to Thoroughbred *owners'* interests. The organization was created as an *owners' organization*, and California state law mandates that it serve as such.

If any owner feels that the organization must be improved, then all we ask is that you work from within to help us to make the changes necessary. California Thoroughbred owners' representation will not be strengthened by two organizations, only weakened. Weakening TOC is the avowed goal of certain other competing racing interests, and should not be such for any group of concerned owners.



Drew J. Couto

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Drew J. Couto'.