The Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation

Commissioner Vincent Roberts

36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

Committee of the Whole

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Fritz Lawaetz Legislative Hall

Good day, Honorable Milton E. Potter, President; Honorable Kenneth L. Gittens, Vice-President; Honorable Avery L. Lewis, Secretary; Honorable Senators of the United States Virgin Islands 36th Legislature; members of the Administration; stakeholders within the horse racing community; and the people of the US Virgin Islands.

I am Vincent L. Roberts, Commissioner for the Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the proposed Horse Racing Agreement and its importance to the future of horse racing, economic development, youth engagement, tourism, and public safety throughout the Territory.

Today, I would like to focus on three primary areas:

1. The work and cost remaining to complete both racetrack facilities.
2. The financial realities of operating and maintaining those facilities.
3. Why preserving and expanding horse racing is important to the Virgin Islands' future.

Horse racing is often viewed solely as a race-day event. However, it is much more than a few weekends of competition each year.

It is an industry.

It supports agriculture, construction, transportation, tourism, hospitality, veterinary services, equipment operation, facility maintenance, food service, security, and small-business development.

It creates jobs.

It provides opportunities for young people.

It generates economic activity.

It preserves an important cultural tradition that has endured in the Virgin Islands for generations.

Therefore, the question before us today is whether we will establish a sustainable framework to complete construction and maintain two racetrack facilities while easing the GVI's financial burden.

The RANDALL "DOC" JAMES RACETRACK, through this body's legislative action, reprogrammed $5 million toward the facility's redevelopment.

100% of the project design is complete. Phase I includes the track surface and perimeter fencing. Phase II includes stables, paddocks, and supporting infrastructure, and Phase III includes the grandstand.

Funds Obligated to Date: $2,685,142.00

Remaining Balance: $2,314,858.00

Which is sufficient for the completion of Phase I, as well as for a portion of Phase II or for the purchase of the necessary track equipment.

An additional estimated $2.5 million will be required to complete phase II, which includes the following:

Phase II includes – Stables and Site Improvements:

- Stable renovations
- Paddocks
- Receiving facilities
- Quarantine facilities
- Supporting infrastructure
- Construction of a 50,000-gallon cistern

Phase III includes – Grandstand Development:

An estimated $12.5 million will be needed to complete Phase III.

- Modern grandstand construction
- Public restrooms
- Concessions
- VIP areas
- Public gathering spaces
- Event infrastructure

The total additional funding required to complete the rebuild the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack facility has been estimated at $15 million.

Completion of all phases would provide St. Croix with a first-class racing and equestrian facility capable of hosting horse racing, youth programs, concerts, festivals, and community events.

While much of the discussion has focused on rebuilding St. Croix's facility, it is important to remember that the Government is already responsible for maintaining the **Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack** on St. Thomas.

On July 21, 2025, under the Final Turnover Agreement, DSPR resumed responsibility for utilities, maintenance, and overall facility operations.

Temporary agreements have enabled Southland Gaming of the Virgin Islands to assist in the promotion and execution of races.

The results have included successful race days, increased community participation, and renewed excitement surrounding horse racing on St. Thomas and throughout the territory.
However, the facility still requires an additional 1 million dollars in improvements to be completed. Areas that still require investment include:

- Grandstand enhancements

- Parking area
- Paddock stable area
- Utility upgrades
- Equipment replacement
- Security infrastructure

It is important for everyone to understand that racetracks incur costs every day—even when no races are held. A racetrack cannot simply be locked between events.

The track surface must be maintained daily.

The Facility and grounds must be maintained.

Equipment must be serviced.

Utilities must remain active.

Security must be provided.

Currently, monthly operational costs at the Clinton Phipps Racetrack average approximately $35,000. Utility expenses at the Clinton Phipps Racetrack currently exceed $120,000 per year.

A minimum of 8 full-time employees would be required if the department assumes indefinite responsibility for the track. The annual salary would total approximately $600,000 per racetrack.

Position	Qty	Estimated Annual Cost
Track Superintendent	1	$80,000
Equipment Operators	2	$110,000
Groundskeepers	2	$84,000
Maintenance Technician	1	$65,000
Security Officers	2	$90,000
Total Salaries	**8**	**$429,000**

This translates to annual operating expenses of approximately 1 million dollars per facility.

Race days incur additional expenses, averaging $60,000, which includes:

- Staff
- Stewards
- Judges
- Veterinarians
- EMS coverage
- Security personnel
- Starting gate operations
- Track preparation

- Equipment deployment
- Regulatory compliance
- Video Recording
- Track announcer
- Photo finish camera
- Supplies

This cost does not account for marketing, entertainment, or other race-day amenities.

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

In addition to operating costs, both facilities require substantial equipment investments.

Randall "Doc" James Racetrack requires an estimated $1.2 million to purchase:

- Two water trucks
- Two tractors
- Starting gate
- Harrows
- Track conditioners
- Track packers
- Float equipment
- Racetrack markers

Clinton Phipps requires an estimated $600,000 to purchase

- Two water trucks
- New tractor
- New starting gate

Approximately $1.8 million in additional funding is needed to purchase essential equipment for both tracks, which is necessary to maintain safe racing conditions and protect both horses and jockeys.

This is the fiscal reality that must be considered.

Without approval of this agreement, the Government of the Virgin Islands assumes *full* responsibility for completing and operating both facilities without private investment.

Immediately identify funding for the following will be required:

- $2.5 million to sustain operations, hire dedicated personnel, purchase essential track equipment, and complete remaining facility improvements at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack.

- $15 million to complete construction of the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack, including the grandstand, stable complex, supporting infrastructure, and racetrack equipment.

- Upon completion, $1 million annually will be required to adequately staff, maintain, and operate the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack.

In total, the government will need to identify $18.5 million for capital improvements, and $2 million annually for operating expenses.

Future race days in the territory will also remain unknown.

The proposed agreement offers a path to preserve horse racing while significantly reducing the long-term financial burden on the Government and the people of the Virgin Islands.

As Commissioner of Sports, Parks, and Recreation, the interest many of our young people have developed in horses and horse racing should not be underestimated. What is overlooked is the industry's opportunities for young people, including structured educational and workforce development pathways.

But the most significant benefit of the horse industry, in my opinion, is its contribution to crime prevention and community engagement. It may simply be a positive influence that changes the course of their lives. This must not be overlooked when considering this agreement.

In many respects, the horse industry serves the same purpose as youth sports, recreation programs, and community centers. It gives people something positive to be involved in.

Horse racing remains one of the Virgin Islands' most recognizable cultural traditions.

A properly operated horse racing industry creates:

The redevelopment of Randall "Doc" James Racetrack and the continued operation of Clinton Phipps present an opportunity to market the Virgin Islands as a unique Caribbean horse-racing destination.

The economic impact extends far beyond race day.

The Department believes the facts are clear.

The Randall "Doc" James Racetrack project is progressing, and Phase I and a portion of Phase II will be completed using existing funds.

However, approximately $15 million is still needed to complete the facility.

Clinton Phipps, ongoing operational costs continue to underscore the substantial financial burden of maintaining a racetrack facility.

Current operating experience indicates annual maintenance and operating expenses of about $1 million per facility.

The Government must therefore carefully evaluate whether it is in the best interests of taxpayers to continue assuming these obligations directly or to enter into a responsible Horse Racing Agreement that transfers a significant share of those responsibilities to a qualified operator while maintaining public oversight.

This agreement is *not* simply about horse racing.

It is about economic development.

It is about tourism. It is about jobs.

It is about youth development.

It is about crime prevention.

It is about preserving an important part of Virgin Islands culture while ensuring the long-term sustainability of both racetracks.

For these reasons, the Department supports moving forward with a Horse Racing Agreement that protects the public interest, reduces long-term government expenditures, and secures horse racing's future in the Virgin Islands.

Thank you. I am available to answer any questions the Committee may have.