

Bryan Meets With Horsemen on Southland Racetrack Agreement as Bolques Urges Separate Review of Gaming Provisions

The governor met with horsemen, the Horse Racing Commission and Southland to address concerns over the racetrack agreement, while Senator Angel Bolques Jr. recommended separating racetrack redevelopment from more controversial gaming-related provisions.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. met with the presidents of the territory's horsemen associations, representatives of the Virgin Islands Horse Racing Commission, and Southland Gaming of the Virgin Islands to discuss concerns surrounding a proposed agreement to rebuild the Randall "Doc" James Racetrack on St. Croix and promote and operate horse racing at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack on St. Thomas.

The meeting, held at Government House on St. Croix, brought the parties together for further discussion and negotiation as the administration seeks to resolve outstanding concerns and build consensus around a sustainable framework for horse racing across the territory.

Governor Bryan publicly announced the agreement on April 28, 2026, and transmitted legislation to the 36th Legislature that same day seeking authorization of the agreement. The proposal would allow Southland Gaming of the Virgin Islands to rebuild and operate the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack while continuing to promote and operate horse racing at the Clinton E. Phipps Racetrack.

After the announcement, representatives of the horsemen associations and some members of the 36th Legislature expressed concerns about certain provisions in the proposed agreement.

In response, Governor Bryan invited the presidents of the Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association and the St. Thomas-St. John Horsemen Association, members of the Legislature and other stakeholders to submit written concerns, objections, proposed amendments and alternative recommendations by June 5, 2026. He also called the meeting to allow for direct discussion and good-faith negotiations.

Written responses were received from Flamboyant Park Horsemen Association President Elroy Bates and St. Thomas-St. John Horsemen Association President Clinton Hedrington. Government House said no members of the 36th Legislature submitted written comments by the June 5 deadline set by the administration. Senator Angel Bolques Jr., however, provided a June 10 written recommendation to Governor Bryan calling for the proposal to be bifurcated.

In his letter, Senator Bolques said his recommendation should not be viewed as opposition to the overall effort to revitalize horse racing, restore sporting infrastructure, stimulate economic activity, attract private investment and advance the redevelopment of the Randall “Doc” James Racetrack and related facilities. He described horse racing as part of the cultural, sporting and economic fabric of the Virgin Islands, particularly on St. Croix.

However, Mr. Bolques argued that the legislation, as currently structured, risks jeopardizing the entire package because concerns over racetrack redevelopment have become intertwined with broader issues tied to certain components of the proposal. He recommended that the administration separate the racetrack redevelopment and horse racing provisions from more controversial gaming-related matters so each component can be reviewed on its own merits.

According to Mr. Bolques, bifurcation would preserve critical economic development initiatives, allow for more focused legislative review, improve public confidence, reduce political risk, provide greater transparency and accountability, and give investors, operators, horsemen and other stakeholders more certainty. He also encouraged continued engagement with horsemen’s organizations, community leaders, industry experts and the public through open dialogue and public hearings before final legislative action is taken.

“Today’s meeting was about moving beyond general concerns and getting the people directly responsible for the future of horse racing around the same table to work through the issues,” Governor Bryan said. “My goal is for the horsemen, the Horse Racing Commission, Southland Gaming and the Government of the Virgin Islands to reach agreement on a responsible and workable framework that can go before the Legislature with the support of the stakeholders who will be responsible for making it work.”

During the meeting, the parties discussed concerns raised in the written responses from the horsemen associations, reviewed provisions of the proposed agreement, and explored possible revisions intended to protect the interests of horsemen, strengthen regulatory oversight and establish clear responsibilities for rebuilding and operating the territory's racetracks, according to Government House.

Governor Bryan said the administration's goal is not only to secure approval of an agreement, but to establish a long-term foundation for an industry that has faced years of legal disputes, delays and uncertainty.

"We all share the same fundamental goal, which is to see horse racing restored on St. Croix and strengthened throughout the Virgin Islands," Governor Bryan said. "Getting there will require compromise, accountability and a willingness by every party to focus on what is necessary to rebuild the industry and sustain it for the long term."

The governor said the discussions were an important step toward refining the agreement before it is considered by the Legislature.

"The people of the Virgin Islands have waited long enough to see meaningful progress," Governor Bryan said. "We now have an opportunity to address legitimate concerns, establish clear expectations and move forward together with an agreement that protects the public interest, respects our horsemen and preserves an important part of Virgin Islands culture."