

January 31, 2012  
Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

Re: Support for SB ~~401~~ 319

Kurt Eck  
12011 W. 19<sup>th</sup>  
Wichita, KS 67235

Chair Brungardt and Committee Members:

My name is Kurt Eck and I am from Wichita, Kansas. I grew up near St. Marks where my family has bred, raised, and raced horses over the past 35 years in the state. I hope to continue this tradition as I continue to add to the investment my family has in rural Kansas.

With the passage of the constitutional amendment for pari-mutual racing in the late 1980's, our state realized how valuable the culture of the racing industry was. Once again, in 2007, the legislature recognized not only the cultural value of the industry, but also the economical value that it brings to agri-business across the state. They realized that the competition for the gaming dollar had become so intense, that the highly regulated pari-mutual and gaming landscape in Kansas had to change to ensure a vibrant horse industry, one that at one point was the 5<sup>th</sup> leading producer of quarter horse foals in the nation. This is an industry capable of producing thousands of jobs and injecting millions of dollars into local rural economies throughout the state. I would like to think that this economic value and cultural preservation were two of the primary reasons why legislation was passed for the expanded lottery act.

Now, four years after that legislation was passed, we see this law did not spur the agri-business as it was intended. It needs to be fixed. The amendments to the bill that have been proposed in SB 319 now provide that opportunity for the racetracks to find it financially attractive to re-open their doors to an entire industry. To be clear, our industry not only includes the breeders, trainers, jockeys, veterinarians, hay and grain producers, tack shops, and others, but also includes the racetrack operators. Without the operators, similar to the money invested by the owner of any other business, the venture would not succeed. The racetracks are the markets for our goods. Without them, we have no need to produce our product, creating thousands of jobs in the rural communities across the state. Horsemen and track operators must work together to create this valuable segment of our state's agri-economy. SB 319 has features that will allow investment of first-class operators which promise to create a demand for the agri-business we support.

From a more personal perspective, my family has been involved in the industry for last four decades. At one time, the family farm was home to nearly 50 horses, most of which were involved in the breeding and raising of running horses. We have since cut back on this operation due to the lack of racing opportunities in the state. Most recently, we have ventured out of state to compete at tracks that provide not only the opportunity to race but also the financial reward necessary to continue investing in the industry. The decision to take horses out of state to race was certainly not easy. Our family took great pride in the fair meets at Eureka and Anthony. The unique entertainment value of horse racing

should not be underestimated, as we invited extended family and friends week after week to the races to enjoy what live racing has to offer. These fair meets were truly a family-oriented atmosphere that many entertainment venues cannot offer, and it would be a shame to let these places lie dormant.

With all this being said, we have an opportunity before us to create that solid foundation for an industry ready to re-generate, to grow, to create jobs, to provide entertainment value, and to stimulate a stagnant economy. The decision was made nearly five years ago that this was an industry worth committing to when the original expanded lottery act was passed. The difficult decisions made back then to get us to this point should not go by the wayside and we now ask that you make the decision to correct the law so that it gets the results that were intended in the first place.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kurt Eck