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California Thoroughbred Trainers Pledge \$150,000 for Urgent Surveillance Program Initiative

ARCADIA, CALIF. – The leadership of California Thoroughbred Trainers (CTT) has voted unanimously to pledge \$150,000 from its reserves to initiate and assist in leading a comprehensive race-day camera surveillance and security program in stable areas at Thoroughbred tracks in California.

The decision was made at a special meeting of its Board of Directors held Saturday, August 29, at Del Mar, and by teleconference with all its directors statewide.

"While CTT has supported proper third-party or independently supervised race-day administration of Lasix since 2011, and continues to do so, we have always pointed out that backstretch security must be tightened at the same time," said James Cassidy, president. "Administering Lasix takes a few minutes, at most," he said, and continued, "What we really need is to take steps to be sure nothing improper happens with any horse during all the many hours the rest of race day, not only when Lasix is administered."

The California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) held a well-attended and very informative meeting on camera surveillance in March 2015 at Los Alamitos, but since then, despite a previous \$150,000 pledge by Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC), no significant steps forward have been taken to apply new digital camera technology to the backstretch in California.

"Any perception that the trainers' governing organization is tolerant of misbehavior or outright cheating has to end," stated Alan F. Balch, executive director of CTT. "Unfortunately, that perception has been fostered, whether or not intentionally, by some regulatory officials and others through gratuitous comments about Lasix and its administration. We want to put a stop to that by tackling the problem properly, not only as to Lasix administration itself, but even more important, by monitoring everything that goes on in the stalls of all horses entered on race day.

"To think that any trainer would be willing to turn a blind eye to cheating by a fellow trainer is ridiculous. What trainers want is a level playing field, where horses shipping and horses on the grounds are all competing under the same circumstances, with the same rules, insofar as is possible. No trainer wants any other trainer to have an advantage. If any trainer is using any impermissible medication or drug, that must be stopped," Balch said, although he emphasized that by the CHRB's own reporting, the incidents even of impermissible medication are at an all-time low, and there is no evidence whatsoever of cheating.

"Nevertheless," he admitted, "to the extent there is even a perception of the possibility of misbehavior, we have said all along that backstretch security must be drastically improved. It is nowhere near what it once was. We believe our pledge, added to the TOC's previous pledge, will stimulate the racing associations and the CHRB also to do their parts to launch this program with urgency."

CTT's leadership envisions that the latest portable high-definition camera technology, coupled with increased backstretch security personnel, will provide the potential of thorough camera surveillance of every stall of horses entered throughout race day, whether shippers or stabled on the grounds.

"No matter what happens with rules governing third-party Lasix administration, which we support and always have," Balch said, "the present proposed rules are a long way from being approved administratively and becoming effective. Since the lengthy regulatory approval process worsens the perception problem, we believe the increased surveillance, as well as supervised administration of Lasix, can be accomplished without any rule changes and may be able to be implemented much, much sooner. We hope to be able to take a leading role in creating a task force on security, with all stakeholders, with the goal of beginning the new program as early as the Del Mar Fall meeting."

Balch said he did not underestimate the practical problems the CTT initiative faces. "If instituting such a program were a simple matter, it would have been done long ago. I think everyone agrees that we need far better backstretch security. But the first problem is always affordability. So that's the first reason we've made our pledge. The most important reason, however, is that we can't afford not to do it. What we need even more than money is will, the will to solve the difficult practical problems we face, to bring the latest digital and automation technology to bear, and to make the process of surveillance far more efficient and affordable than it ever has been."

The California Racing Law places the general responsibility of negotiating with racing associations over issues relating to the backstretch with the trainers' organization, so CTT believes it is fitting that it offer to spearhead the initiative and bring a sense of urgency to it. Balch said the CTT will be communicating its ideas to the CHRB formally and in more detail this week, in advance of and at the Medication and Safety Committee meeting noticed to be held at Del Mar on Friday, September 4.