

## **OPEN LETTER TO COMMISSIONER GOREE: IF YOU LIVE IN A GLASS HOUSE DON'T THROW STONES!**

Tucson, AZ – On the morning of Tuesday, March 1, 2022, my phone started ringing off the hook and I immediately knew something was askew—and it probably wasn't good. As a horseracing professional just completing opening weekend of racing at Rillito Downs in Tucson, Arizona, I had an over boding sense trouble was brewing on the horizon. Why? The more success Rillito Downs reports, the bigger target they become for people who have axes to grind against the sport of horseracing, the racetrack owners and operators, and horseracing professionals. This past opening weekend, Rillito reported record attendance on both days and nearly tripled the live handle for both Saturday and Sunday! Don't get me wrong, I've had my share of issues with racetracks in Arizona and elsewhere, but I also realize it is one of the toughest industries to operate. It's like being a fish in a barrel ... and the shots are coming faster than you can swim!

So why the open letter to Commissioner Goree? To ask him to think before he acts. Think before he writes articles replete with intentionally inflammatory and inciteful language in letters to the editor such as the one he wrote and the Paulick Report published on March 1, 2022 (*Goree: Arizona Horse Tracks Are 'A Killing Field' And It Has To Stop*). As I read Commissioner Goree's letter and his attempt to annihilate certain government and elected officials, and individuals in Arizona's horseracing industry, I wondered what would cause an individual to spew forth such destructive rhetoric when just days before he stood on the grounds of Rillito Park Downs and praised track management for such a fine job in getting the track ready for opening weekend. Reading through Goree's letter, I saw the reason: this guy's got an ax to grind and he's not a happy camper!

Goree doesn't like that the Regulatory Wage Assessment (RWA) was lowered cutting nearly \$1 million in funding to the Arizona Department of Racing's annual budget. A tough call to swallow considering the department's annual budget in past years hovered around \$2 million annually. Goree's disruptive comments didn't stop there. He went full force in his letter's opening statement providing readers a devastating visual image of a horse who broke down at the Rillito track on opening weekend. No one likes to see a horse break down. Just like we don't like seeing soccer kids get trampled on the playing field or Olympic athletes meet suffering last minute injuries preventing them from getting to the podium. But, to add insult to injury, Goree's call for an immediate moratorium on horseracing until "proper funding is enacted" was

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akin to Biden's shutting down the Keystone XL pipeline without any forethought of the impact of this decision on the everyday worker, the family, and the economy. Imagine what would happen to the thousands of horseracing industry workers, families, and businesses who suddenly find themselves on the bread lines—if you can even find bread at the local stores on some days. And, don't even get me started on what would happen to the inventory of horses coming off the racetrack. I don't think there are any federal eviction prevention programs in the "Build Back Better" agenda that horses can apply for should they find themselves homeless. Don't get me wrong, we should all work to improve any industry in which we operate, but we need to do it

wisely and not in a manner that incites outrage, confusion, hostility, and bias. We must be the problem solvers and work in good faith to find solutions to our issues.

What I find puzzling is Commissioner Goree's method of expressing his opinions. Goree knew full well, or should have known, the widespread dissemination of the Paulick Report and the outrage his comments would elicit. Perhaps that was his intent, perhaps not. Is Goree trying to shut down the horseracing industry singlehandedly or is he so blindsided he's not able to fully realize the impact of his negatively charged comments? I have personally observed Commissioner Goree for several years at racing commission meetings and, while I may not agree with some of his operatives, I believe he views his role to be that of an agent of change, leading the charge to horseracing accountability standards.

With that in mind, I'm countering Commissioner Goree's agenda and asking him to lead the charge to hold the Arizona Racing Commissioners responsible for enacting the powers and authority delegated to them in Arizona Administrative Code Title 19, Chpt. 2. Arizona Racing Commission ([19-02.fm \(az.gov\)](http://19-02.fm.az.gov)). Namely, when the commission holds their monthly meetings require each organization detailed on the commission's standing agenda to present monthly reports. For years, I have observed these commission meetings and month-after-month, year-after-year, I see the same organizations not providing monthly reports to the commission about their operations and activities. That is, except for one group: Turf Paradise who always reports whether we like to subject matter or not.

So, Commissioner Goree, before you start throwing the gauntlet at the horseracing industry, I think you need to do a little bit of housecleaning with the Arizona Racing Commissioners. If you as a commissioner set the standard of accepting "no reports" or "no presence" at commission meetings, what right do you have to criticize others when you do not hold these same organizations responsible for reporting to you—the Commissioners? It is not acceptable for these organizations to state repeatedly "no news" to report to the Commission or not show up to the commission meeting. There obviously *is* quite a bit of news as you have pointed out in your various articles submitted to the media for publication. And you don't hold back submitting your articles with sensationalized headlines accusing racetracks of being "killing fields." Are you guilty of creating your own killing field by not upholding your oath to the racing commission? Hold these organizations responsible for monthly reports—that's part of your job!

In closing, Commissioner Goree, and with all due respect, I support your efforts to create a more responsible and safer environment for the horseracing industry. What I do not support is the throwing of stones at the industry ... especially when one resides in a glass house. Let's work together to solve the problems, not be the problem throwers.

*Tim Kelly is the former President – Pima County Horsemen's Association and has served as a former Commissioner for the Pima County Horse Racing Commission. Kelly also served as the Parimutuel Manager for Rillito racetrack for 28 years.*