

Possible NYRA Plan Concerns Saratoga Group

By Tom Precious

Courtesy BloodHorse.com

A Saratoga Springs Thoroughbred group is blasting a plan for the future of the New York Racing Association that it claims is being circulated by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The Concerned Citizens for Saratoga Racing, without specifically citing its sources, said May 24 the governor's draft proposals allow for too many government appointees on the NYRA board, gives the governor say over who would chair the board, and reduces by some level VLT proceeds that currently go for capital improvements at [Aqueduct Racetrack](#), [Belmont Park](#), and [Saratoga Race Course](#).

In a written statement, the Cuomo administration did not specifically address the Saratoga group's claims about the governor's negotiating position regarding NYRA's future governance model.

"Governor Cuomo and the Legislature saved NYRA from yet another bankruptcy in 2012 and installed a board and management team that has brought success on every metric, while being accountable to the racing industry, taxpayers, and host communities, including Saratoga Springs," said Cuomo spokesman Richard Azzopardi. "The governor will ensure the future of NYRA continues this trajectory of success."

The warning by the Saratoga group, which includes at least two former NYRA board members, comes as Cuomo and lawmakers consider options for the future governance of the Thoroughbred racing corporation as it seeks to emerge from a period in which Cuomo has had control over the appointments of a majority of the board. The 2012 reorganization law, which was to have expired last year, was extended until the end of 2016.

A decision to revert NYRA back to private control, or to extend the state control period for another year, must be made before the state Legislature ends its 2016 session on June 16.

Maureen Lewi, chair of Concerned Citizens for Saratoga Racing, said the group has compiled the list of what it says are Cuomo's NYRA ideas from "various sources" over the past week. She did not elaborate.

"We decided to get it out now before too many things happen," Lewi said of the NYRA governance discussions taking place at the state Capitol.

The group said the governor wants to appoint five of 15 board members of a re-privatized NYRA, not including the one selection apiece that would come from the heads of the Assembly and Senate. The group claims Cuomo also wants to appoint the new chair and to divert an unknown amount of money that now goes to NYRA purses and breeding funds.

The group also says the Cuomo plan calls for providing "sweeping new powers to various public agencies" that would be able to "manipulate NYRA's budget and operations."

"Four years ago, this governor promised to return NYRA to a not-for-profit corporation in three years. He did not keep that promise last year. This year, his plan is another means by which he is seeking to exert his control over NYRA and the future of our state's Thoroughbred racing industry," the group said in a statement. The group's members include John Hendrickson and Charles Wait, both former NYRA board members.

Cuomo has not formally released any plan for NYRA's future. Whatever emerges would be subject to negotiation with the Legislature.

The heads of the Assembly and Senate racing committees last week outlined plans lawmakers are considering for the future of NYRA. Senator John Bonacic said one Senate idea called for three government appointees to the board--one by Cuomo and the other two by the legislative leaders. He said the NYRA CEO, currently Chris Kay, would get a seat on the board, as would one representative apiece from the New York Thoroughbred Breeders and the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association. Eight members would be considered as representing the "private" sector, under one Senate plan, although they would have to be approved by the executive committee of the existing NYRA reorganization board.

Assemblyman Gary Pretlow last week said one Assembly plan calls for all current NYRA board members appointed by the governor to be removed while the NYRA-selected members could

stay. His plan mirrored Bonacic's with three members appointed by the governor and legislative leaders and a voting role for the horsemen and breeders group.