

Texas Racing Commission retains historical racing

August 26, 2015

AUSTIN—In a surprising move, the Texas Racing Commission voted Aug. 25 to keep in its rules that govern racetracks references to “historical racing,” putting the agency’s funding at risk.

The commission’s action prompted anti-gambling activists to urge Gov. Greg Abbott to remove the commissioners from office and replace them.

Rodger WeemsAlso called “instant racing,” the historic racing electronic devices display information and a brief video clip from previously run races, stripped of identifying markers.

Last year, 15 state senators asserted the commission overstepped its authority by using its rulemaking privilege to expand gambling, and [a state judge ruled](#) the agency lacked authority to allow historical racing in Texas.

State senators initially left out funding for the Texas Racing Commission from the state budget. Although legislators eventually restored it, a budget rider withheld part of the money, pending approval by the legislative budget board.

Without legislative authorization, the Texas Racing Commission could lose its funding Sept. 1.

Early this summer, [the commission voted](#) 6-2 to begin the process of removing all references to historical racing terminals from racetrack rules. But the commission reversed course Aug. 25, voting not to repeal historical racing.

Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, chair of the Senate Finance Committee,

was among the senators who criticized the commission for seeking to expand gambling without legislative or voter approval.

'Vendetta' claimed

At the Aug. 25 public hearing, the *Austin American-Statesman* [reported](#) horseracing industry representatives accused Nelson of carrying out a vendetta against them, and some commissioners asserted they felt blackmailed into repealing the rule to allow historic racing.

Those comments drew a rebuke from Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who said he was "shocked ... at the inappropriate tone and language" used in the hearing, adding the commission owed Nelson an apology.

"The decision of the Texas Racing Commission to thumb its nose at the Texas Legislature by affirming historical racing is beyond disappointing," said Rodger Weems, chair of Stop Predatory Gambling-Texas.

"Even more disappointing is the incivility displayed by some commissioners in their personal attacks on Sen. Jane Nelson. We join Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick in calling for a public apology from the commissioners to Sen. Nelson."

Weems and Rob Kohler, consultant with Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission, noted a majority of the commissioners are appointed by the governor and serve at his pleasure.

Call to remove racing commissioners

"We hope Gov. Abbott will jump in and provide leadership by removing the commissioners and appointing new commissioners," Kohler said.

"To put it bluntly, the citizens of Texas deserve better," Weems added. "Resolution of this matter ultimately rests with Gov. Abbott."