



# RACING COMMENTARY

with Bob Barry

## FEAR OF AN UNKNOWN PLANET

Throwing a Hail Mary. Pulling the goalie. Desperate measures are all right, if they are taken in desperate times. Thoroughbred racing has lately added a new one. Taking an intractable problem to Washington so that Congress might fix it.

If House Resolution 3084—the Thoroughbred Horseracing Integrity Act of 2015—can complete the steeplechase from "bill" into "law," New Year's Day 2017 will ring in a new era for American racing. Whether race-day Lasix will be a part of that brave new world is anybody's guess, and that is putting the knickers of more than a few trainers into an awful twist. Nothing strikes fear into people quite like the unknown.

The skeptic might think that all of this hue and cry about race-day Lasix is just a dodge. That the real fears are about level playing fields, and effective testing, and sanctions with teeth, rather than whether or not little dobbie gets his Lasix. Look at California, where horsemen are fighting tooth and nail to avoid "third-party" administration of pre-race Lasix shots. Who—these horsemen ask, in all apparent sincerity—could ever have an issue with private vets injecting horses just a few hours before they race?

However, the bill's language certainly opened the door for horsemen's groups to make Lasix their Alamo. The bill's "initial list" of prohibited substances would include anything on the 2015 Prohibited List of the World Anti-Doping Code, which would rule out race-day Lasix.

The agency that would be created by this legislation—the Thoroughbred Horseracing



MATHEA KELLEY

Is the goal of the Horseracing Integrity Act to end race-day use of Lasix?

Anti-Doping Authority—has the power to amend this initial list whenever it sees fit. But with minimal representation on THADA's board of directors (horsemen would likely get one or, at most, two seats on an 11-member board sure to be dominated by the United States Anti-Doping Agency), trainers are sensing that the deck is stacked against them.

As a horseplayer who would love to see a bill like this become law—these are desperate times in need of desperate measures—I do wish this one had some "carve-outs" or "phase-outs" for Lasix. Not only would that make it more difficult for horsemen to gripe, but it would also give horseplayers some protection against "known unknowns."

Roughly 55,000 different Thoroughbreds started in a race last year, and almost all of them ran on Lasix, whether they needed it or not. Imagine handicapping races where all the horses are "off Lasix." How confident would you be? The veterinary science may still be out. But, after 25 years of looking for that "L" in the past performances, horseplayers know what to think when Lasix is added. It's what happens when it is taken away that remains a complete mystery. **BH**