

# What Does It Mean?



**By Steven Fisch, D.V.M.**

TO A LOT OF PEOPLE, AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE racing means watching the fastest horses on earth come out of the starting gates at nearly top speed and race to the finish line with their great power and heart. But to state legislators, it means economic development.

If economic development is not what comes to mind when your state legislature thinks about Quarter Horse racing, then someone needs to take the time to educate the legislators about what top-quality Quarter Horses can mean economically. Most of us in the horse business are not politically minded. We know what we would like to happen, but we leave it up to “them” to do what needs to be done politically.

It is up to us to take care of our own business, because if we do not, we will miss windows of opportunity that might make a tremendous positive difference in the lives of owners, breeders and trainers, and their employees, families, and related industries.

The least every one of us should do is to be a member of AQHA and our state association. Membership numbers speak volumes to legislators. They understand numbers.

When Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association members made their first trip to the legislature in January 2006, 95 percent of the legislators did not really know what a Quarter Horse was and surely did not know they raced. We got comments like, “Are they like ‘Cracker’ horses?” or “I had a Quarter Horse when I was a kid. She was mainly white with some brown spots.”

By the 2007 legislative session, most of the legislators knew that Quarter Horses were the sprinters of the racing world and that they were the fastest horses on earth. They knew that a top-quality Quarter Horse could be syndicated or sold for millions of dollars. They knew that every racing Quarter Horse

on a track creates seven jobs in the state.

It takes preparation and opportunity to get a bill passed. In the 2008 legislative session, the first bill in more than 20 years with a Quarter Horse racing association from Florida named was passed in the Senate but never made it out of the House. We received great help from legislators like Sen. Dennis Jones. People like him are a big reason we got as far as we did through 2008.

But we had worked three years and still did not have Quarter Horse racing in Florida. Persistence is a must if something of importance is to be accomplished. In 2009, Rep. Bill Galvano and Sen. Al Lawson understood the positive impact Quarter Horse racing could mean to the economy of the state of Florida, and with their help, SB 788 was passed. In a nutshell, it gave Quarter Horse-permitted tracks certain provisions that would help them compete with leading racing states across the country and was coupled with an Indian gaming compact. Our work is not done, but SB 788 is a good start. Education is a never-ending process.

The Hialeah Park meet is an example of what can happen when the people in an industry work together. The leadership at AQHA and leaders from other states such as Laverne Perry from Louisiana and Debbie Schauf from Oklahoma came and gave freely of their time and knowledge. AQHA supported us financially when all we had were membership dues to support us. Trainers and owners from across the country have come and supported this inaugural meet. We have had support from the horse show industry because they know a sound racing Quarter Horse industry has spinoff benefits for them.

I asked a hotel owner in Hialeah what Quarter Horse racing meant to her. She said it means the difference in breaking even over those 13 weeks and \$39,000 added to the bottom line. Successful, top-quality Quarter Horse racing means selfless people working together to create the jobs and economic development that each state legislature wants dearly in these tough economic times. Make sure Quarter Horse racing means jobs and economic development to your state legislature. ■

*Steven Fisch, D.V.M., is the president of the Florida Quarter Horse Racing Association. He also owns and operates AVS Equine Hospital in Tallahassee, Florida. To comment, write to [aqhajrnl@aqha.org](mailto:aqhajrnl@aqha.org).*

*Quarter Horse racing has meaning far off the track.*