

# Joe Gorajec: In Early Stages Of Its Existence, HISA Fails Transparency Test

SARATOGA SPRINGS , NEW YORK, UNITED STATES , August 10, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The new Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority (HISA), despite repeated pledges of transparency, has failed to disclose even the most basic information about its own manner of governance. This failure is well below the standards and practices of state racing commissions.

## Background

On July 5, 2022, Marty Irby, executive director of the Animal Wellness Action, made a written request of Lisa Lazarus, the CEO of HISA, for documents and items of interest ([letter here](#)). The request asked for the information to be provided within 30 days. Ms. Lazarus subsequently acknowledged receipt of the request. The request remains unfulfilled.



Left to right: Joe Gorajec and Marty Irby at the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame on August 10, 2019

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*Joe Gorajec, former chair of the Association of Racing Commissioners Intl.*

Having served as executive director of the Indiana Horse Racing Commission for 25 years (1990-2015), I have experience in providing the public and racing participants with information about its regulator. In my opinion, the type of information requested of HISA, in most all instances, is available to the public by state racing commissions through its websites, state databases or by written request. In fact, I suggested each and every item of information that Mr. Irby requested verbatim in his letter dated July 5, 2022.

Quite frankly, much of the information requested should already be available on HISA's website. Including,

- 1) Notices, agendas, minutes, transcripts, and information packets of HISA board of directors' meetings along with the same information regarding the Anti-Doping and Medication Control Committee and Racetrack Safety Committee.
- 2) Mechanism by which the public can attend and participate at these meetings.
- 3) A detailed itemized annual budget.
- 4) List of employees along with title and salaries.
- 5) Copy of contracts.
- 6) List of donations, gifts, and loans.

# animal wellness action

The request was made in conjunction with Animal Wellness Action announcing a watchdog initiative ([hisawatchdog.org](http://hisawatchdog.org)) to hold HISA accountable to the highest of regulatory standards. The basic information requested was an initial step to review an aspect of HISA's regulatory performance. As HISA did not comply with the request, we are left to critique its lack of transparency.

## Behind closed doors

Unlike state racing commissions which are statutorily mandated to conduct its business in full view of the public, HISA as a non-public entity has chosen to operate away from public view. This practice raises issues and concerns not only of transparency but also of competency. Simple questions go unanswered. Do the board directors even meet? How often? Do they all show up? Do they participate in meetings? Are they fully engaged? Do they ask intelligent questions? What issues are discussed and decided? Are they given access to all pertinent information? What staff recommendations are provided? How do they vote? Or, for that matter, do they even vote?

With no notice of meetings, no public agenda, no minutes, and no transcript, what is the public or racing participant to think?

And that's not the worst of it! Even if those documents are made public, why the secrecy? Shouldn't the people who have skin in the game and are affected by HISA's decisions that impact their livelihoods have the opportunity to look their regulators in the eye and make their pitch. Shouldn't the public have access to ALL meetings. Regardless of the outcome of any particular issue, at least racing industry participants should get a fair shake that can only be provided in an open meeting.

What Is HISA afraid of?

Quite frankly, I don't want to just see the document. I want to see the board and committees live, in person if possible or through a webcast, to judge for myself on whether they are competent and acting in the best interest of the racing industry

A one-way street named hypocrisy

HISA talks BIG about transparency. In fact, it has repeatedly bragged on how much information it is requiring industry participants to provide to them. Most all participants, including trainers, jockeys and grooms, are required to register with HISA. All horses, and their ever-changing whereabouts must also be registered. HISA is also requiring an unprecedented amount of minute and detailed information to be disclosed from veterinarians and racing operators.

I, for one, am not opposed to these requirements. As a long-time advocate for federal oversight, I believe these requirements are necessary as long as they are utilized properly and with appropriate disclosure to the public.

So, let's contrast HISA's big transparency talk with its practice of non-self-disclosure. There is a word to describe those who "talk the talk" but don't "walk the walk" or have a "do as I say, not as I do" attitude. The word is hypocrisy.

Who is paying for all this anyway?

One of the most contentious and feared aspects of HISA oversight is how much it is going to cost and who is going to have to pay for it all. To some the cost may be an unreasonable and unnecessary burden while, on the other end of the spectrum, others may feel the amount being spent is not enough to do the job properly.

The HISA assessment for 2022 is \$14.3 million. Payment options vary among states but most commonly are shared by tracks and horsemen. This year's assessment covers only the racetrack safety portion of HISA's responsibilities. The assessment may balloon when the anti-doping responsibilities begin next year. This makes HISA's position to shield its expenditures from industry scrutiny untenable.

One of the most basic and straightforward ways to determine financial responsibility is to review a detailed itemized budget, related contracts, and employee list with salaries. None of which HISA has provided.

At this stage in the game, any assurances from HISA about being financially responsible is bound to be self-serving. No talk. Action. Meaning provide the documents so the public can decide for themselves.

Note to HISA: remember who is paying for all this!

## Conclusion

With regards to the transparency of self-disclosure, HISA is all take-take-take and no give-give-give.

Hypocrisy is always a bad look. In fact, the optics are horrible.

Animal Action Wellness, through its watchdog efforts at [hisawatchdog.org](https://hisawatchdog.org), is committed to hold HISA accountable to the highest regulatory standards.

Joe Gorajec (retired) served as the executive director of the Indiana Horse Racing Commission for 25 years (1990-2015) and is a past chairman of the Racing Commissioners International (2008). He has volunteered as an unpaid advisor to the [hisawatchdog.org](https://hisawatchdog.org). This piece originally ran on August 9, 2022 in [The Paulick Report](#).

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