Questionnaire Response: Ontario Harness Horse Association (OHHA)

1. Are you prepared to cancel the current OLG modernization strategy and to properly engage stakeholders in the gaming sector , the horse racing industry and the municipal level, to ensure the province's plans for gaming have the support of stakeholders before rolling them out?

No. Ontario Liberals are not prepared to cancel OLG modernization. However, the Wynne government does recognize that the integration of racetracks into the OLG modernization strategy is critical to the sustainability of the horse racing industry and the success of modernization efforts going forward.

That is why Ontario Liberals feel that it's essential that the OLG's competitive procurement process for gaming site service providers be weighted to recognize the value of horse racing. Future gaming site procurement documents will also contain criteria related to horse racing.

While Ontario Liberals do believe that racetracks should be given priority consideration in the placement of new casinos, these are discussions that require input from municipal authorities to ensure that the unique circumstances of each community receive careful, local consideration. Stakeholder engagement will be a key part of this process.

2. Will you commit to clean sweep of the executive offices at the OLG to remove the entire project team that was responsible for the gaming modernization fiasco that will cost the province more than $2 billion in revenue over the next five years, and that resulted in thousands of rural Ontario jobs being lost?

Since assuming office in February 2013, the Wynne government has made changes to the executive of OLG. We have also provided its new executive with clear direction and a mandate to move forward with modernization efforts with due consideration for horse racing, including:

- Sharing its business, marketing and responsible gambling expertise in support of horse racing;

- Working with the industry in marketing horse racing and enhancing the on-track experience;

- Collaborating on new horse racing-themed lottery products to generate additional revenue streams; and

- Optimizing the use of racetrack infrastructure as multi-gaming sites.

We are committed to building a sustainable, more customer-responsive industry in Ontario, with an investment of up to $500 million over the next five years.

Ontario Liberals have more work to do, but we are confident that our government is now on track to stabilize the industry, and more importantly, to position the industry to expand and capture significant growth opportunities. World class horse racing in Ontario is here to stay.

3. Will you ensure that future OLG executives do not have a bias against horse racing and do not use the agency's mandate to disrupt the industry?

Leadership starts at the top. By appointing a new board at OLG in 2013, the Wynne government has helped ensure that OLG is well-managed and well-governed. Moreover, since assuming office, the Wynne government has worked diligently to implement the recommendations of the Transition Panel and to ensure that horse racing is a priority consideration within the OLG modernization strategy. Ontario Liberals remain committed to ensuring that the OLG is provided clear direction on the key components of integration as outlined above.

4. Will you commit to ensuring the the horse racing industry is fully integrated into the province's gaming strategy and a priority is placed on expanding gaming at racetracks as a first and primary source of gaming expansion sites in Ontario?

Ontario Liberals recognize that the integration of racetracks into the OLG modernization strategy is critical to the sustainability of the horse racing industry. That is why we feel it is essential that the OLG's competitive procurement process for gaming site service providers be weighted to recognize the value of horse racing. Future gaming site procurement documents will also contain criteria related to horse racing.

5. Will you ensure fairness between racetracks and the various horse racing breeds as part of your plans for the horse racing industry in Ontario?

The Ontario Horse Racing Partnership Plan outlines a strategy for working with all horse racing breeds — Standardbred, Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse — and racetracks across the province. We have established an innovative, unparalleled alliance of standardbred tracks to provide a solid foundation for Ontario Standardbred owners, breeders, and horse persons.

The Wynne government has increased funding for purses and operational support for regional tracks to give operators the tools to develop new sources of revenue and build business relationships that will support a sustainable horse racing industry in Ontario. The Partnership Plan includes an enhanced Horse Improvement Program to provide incentives for Ontario bred and sired horses of all breeds racing in their home province. And we are supporting measures to ensure that racehorses are treated humanely both while they are racing and after retirement.

Ontario Liberals have a detailed plan to support a commercially viable model of world class Standardbred, Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing, while encouraging the industry to become more consumer-oriented and grow its fan base and wagering revenues.

6. Will you commit to providing long-term stability to the horse racing industry by reinstating SARP or another form of predictable revenue sharing so that horse people are able to plan and invest in Ontario again?

As Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food, Premier Wynne has delivered on her commitment to create a long-term sustainable future for the horse racing industry by implementing the Horse Racing Partnership Plan. Since taking office, I have worked closely with the Transition Panel to implement their recommendations, with particular attention to the three basic pillars outlined as essential to the future success of the industry:

- A new industry governance structure;

- A five year, $500-million commitment to stabilize the industry and provide an environment that supports opportunities for growth; and

- Integrating horse racing into the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission's modernization plan, which includes developing new horse racing-themed gaming products in partnership with the OLG and priority consideration of horse racing in the land-based gaming modernization process.

In her report, the Auditor General noted that under SARP: "owners grew reliant on their growing slots revenue share just to sustain their horse-racing operations." Consequently, we will not re-introduce a program repeatedly shown to be bad public policy. Instead, the Ontario Liberal Party commits to providing the appropriate public support needed to maintain a foundation for racing, and more importantly, to provide the industry with the tools and opportunities for growth.

An integral part of horse racing integration into OLG modernization is consideration of an alignment of incentives between industry and the OLG to ensure that the proceeds of integration benefit the horse racing industry. I am committed to working with stakeholder groups, race tracks, and the OLG to further develop a model and targets for revenue growth that would further support the long-term viability of horse racing in Ontario.

Now is not the time to go backwards. The future for the industry – here and across North America -- is in looking forward and building a new fan base for the sport. Ontario Liberals have a plan to ensure that Ontario's rich history of horse racing endures for many seasons to come.

 7. Will you commit to establishing benchmarks, reporting procedures and timelines to ensure that racetrack operators invest in supporting and promoting live horse racing in the province?

Yes, building in accountability is a priority feature of the Partnership Plan. The transfer agreements with tracks include reporting protocols which contemplate performance measures being established to ensure that operators invest and re-invest in racing tracks in a manner that seeks to enhance the customer experience and grow the fan base of the sport.