

Written by Administrator

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Right before the election of a new governor, Jay “J.B.” Pritzker, who supported the gaming bill, in 2018, Churchill Downs, bought a 60 percent interest in the Rivers casino, 13 miles from Arlington. “I remember it being Halloween when that deal was announced,” McCaffrey said. “There was all this optimism that the damn gaming bill might finally be passed in 2019.”

Pritzker took office in January 2019. The gaming bill passed both houses and was indeed signed into law on June 27, 2019, authorizing Illinois’ three remaining racetracks: Arlington Park, Fairmount Park and Hawthorne to build racinos. But Churchill Downs didn’t even apply for a racino license. “Churchill Downs decided this gaming bill doesn’t work for them and were not going to apply for the racino license at Arlington despite the fact that they were screaming for the bill to get passed for 10 years,” McCaffrey said.

It got worse. The coronavirus pandemic struck this spring, and Arlington’s already reduced meeting of 70 days were slashed to 30 minus Arlington’s signature races including the Arlington Million.

On July 31, according to a story in Chicago’s *Daily Herald*, Churchill Downs Inc. CEO Bill Carstanjen, on a quarterly earnings call with investors, said, “The long-term solution is not Arlington Park. That land will have a higher and better purpose for something else at some point. But we want to work constructively with all of the constituencies in the market to see if there’s an opportunity to move the license or otherwise change the circumstances so that racing can continue to Illinois. For us, we’ve been patient and thoughtful and constructive with the parties up in that jurisdiction, but long term, that land gets sold.”

Mike Campbell is buying none of that. “I’ve repeatedly said I’ve had conversations with several gaming companies to buy Arlington Park—three gaming companies and a very wealthy horse owner all made inquiries to Churchill Downs. Churchill Downs said, ‘Not interested.’ They’re just not interested. Carstanjen said, ‘a higher use than a racetrack. Who the hell is he to say it’s suited for a better purpose? There are thousands of jobs involved. I think that what’s going to happen at Arlington is that in the middle of the night they’re going to come in and excavate that track in a manner that it can’t be fixed. Just do it and don’t ask questions.’”

“It’s exasperating,” Campbell said. “I’ve been president of the horsemen for 10 years. I’m all in for my horsemen. I told my board I’ll do everything I can to step in front of the train to slow it

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down. But money always wins. I'm the first to recognize it.”

Phone calls to Churchill Downs, Inc. requesting a comment were not returned. ...

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