

Guest commentary: Greyhound racing/gambling 'decoupling' will help animals

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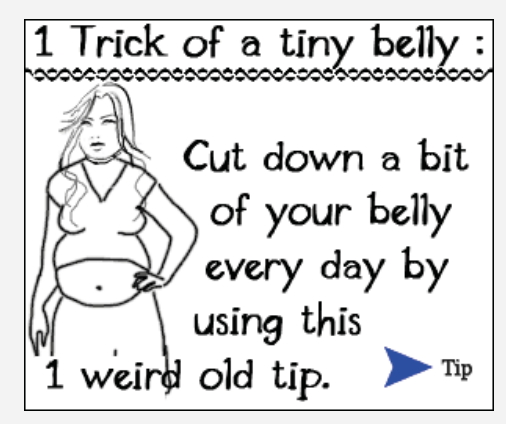
Theil

After decades of being used as numbers to gamble on, Florida greyhounds might finally get their day. Two bills now pending in the state Legislature (House Bill 1145 and Senate Bill 1594) would decouple greyhound racing from other forms of wagering and leave the fate of dog racing to the open market. If approved, these bills will help thousands of dogs and strengthen local businesses.

Under the current law, tracks must hold live greyhound races in order to offer other forms of wagering. This dog racing mandate makes no sense. Across the state, people are going to these facilities to play poker, or

place a bet on a simulcast horse race, while the grandstands sit empty and greyhounds run in circles with virtually no one watching. The pending greyhound decoupling bills do not expand gambling in any way, but simply allow the free market to determine whether dog racing continues.

Greyhound racing is a dying industry. Nationally, the dog racing industry has been cut in half in five years and now only exists in seven states. In Florida, the amount gambled on live dog racing declined by 57 percent between 2002 and 2010. Similarly, state revenue from live greyhound racing has declined by nearly 97 percent since 1990, and now represents less than \$3 million statewide. This does not include regulatory costs; and when those costs are taken into account, it is possible the state is actually losing money on dog racing. Many racetracks are also losing money on this part of their business.



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Most importantly, the passage of greyhound decoupling legislation would be a victory for everyone in the state who cares about dogs. At 13 race tracks across the state, thousands of greyhounds endure lives of confinement and many suffer serious injuries. Allowing dog racing to be subject to the open market will undoubtedly lead to significant decreases in greyhound injuries and confinement.

Across the country, there is increasing public opposition to greyhound racing due to humane concerns. Massachusetts citizens overwhelmingly voted to prohibit dog racing in 2008, and state Legislatures in New Hampshire and Rhode Island prohibited live greyhound racing in 2010. Just last month, the Pennsylvania Legislature voted to prohibit greyhound simulcasting.

Dog racing is cruel and inhumane and should be allowed to end. Greyhound breeders have made all sorts of false claims in an attempt to defeat these humane proposals, using faulty logic and trumped-up economic claims. It should surprise no one that they would fight to protect the dog racing mandate, as it is essentially a state subsidy of their activities.

Dog racing supporters have even claimed that these bills would somehow harm greyhounds, making it difficult for them to be adopted as pets. This is completely false. The fact is, since 2005, tracks have ended live greyhound racing in eight states. Each time, adoption groups were able to mobilize and find homes for any dogs that were displaced. Also, animal protection groups like GREY2K USA, the Humane Society of the United States and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals stand ready to offer assistance. To us, this is an opportunity to help even more greyhounds find loving homes.

As Americans, we have a proud tradition when it comes to the humane treatment of animals. It also goes against our values to force a business to conduct one activity so that it may offer another. These are values that are shared by both liberals and conservatives, and by people from all ideologies and walks of life.

Please contact your state representative and state senator today and ask them to support greyhound decoupling. Florida's greyhounds can't speak for themselves, and need us to be their voice.

GREY2K USA is a national, nonprofit greyhound protection organization. For more information, go to www.GREY2KUSA.org.

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