

Attitudes about greyhound racing have “unquestionably moved” in Iowa legislature

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A key legislator senses changing attitudes among lawmakers about greyhound racing, with the possibility a deal could emerge that would lead to banning dog racing in Iowa. Iowa has two dog tracks — in Council Bluffs and Dubuque. House Speaker Kraig Paulsen, a Republican from Hiawatha, says there's been a “fascinating” transformation.

“If you view the legislature as, you know, a body with its own personality and ego and stuff, it moves and this is one of the issues that has, unquestionably, moved over the last handful of years,” Paulsen says. “Nobody really talked about this when I first got elected ... (but) each year the question you're asking, which is: Are we going to no longer mandate dog racing? — which is what we do right now — seems to pick up speed.”

In 2010 and again in 2012 proposals emerged that would have had the two casinos which host greyhound racing offered to pay the state millions in return for an end to dog racing. Senate Democratic Leader Mike Gronstal of Council Bluffs says “it remains to be seen” what happens this year.

“I've tried to encourage the entities involved to look for a way that doesn't just pull the rug out from under people that have put significant investment into dog racing and lets them exit this in Iowa in a reasonable way makes some sense,” Gronstal says. “...I'm hopeful that bears fruit.”

The speaker of the House agrees.

“I think the interested parties ought to come back to us with a proposal that meets the needs and the concerns of those folks and then we can address it,” Paulsen says.

Paulsen and Gronstal made their comments during taping of Iowa Public Television's “Iowa Press” program which airs Friday at 7:30 p.m.

Iowa made it legal to bet on greyhound races in the mid-1980s, but after the state legalized casino-style gambling on riverboats in 1991, attendance and wagering at the dog tracks began a significant decline. In 1991 at the Dubuque track, for example, gamblers wagered over \$28 million on dog races, but wagering is now below \$2 million a year. There are 21 greyhound racing tracks operating today in the United States. Nearly 30 have closed in the past six years.

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