

Poll paid by greyhound advocacy group says lowans support end to dog racing

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An independent poll of 501 Iowa voters finds that a majority would support legislation to end greyhound racing in Iowa.

The statewide survey, conducted between Jan. 24 and Jan. 27 by Hill Research Consultants of Auburn, Ala., found that voters by a margin of 57 percent to 28 percent would support a bill to allow the closure of Iowa's two dog-racing tracks. Fifteen percent were unsure.

In addition, the poll found that 54 percent of lowans surveyed said they had an "unfavorable" impression of the dog racing in Iowa today, while 29 percent said they had a "favorable" impression. Seventeen percent were unsure.

The poll was paid for the GREY2K USA Education Fund, which is associated with GREY2K USA, a Massachusetts-based advocacy group which wants to end greyhound racing in Iowa.

Dog racing has been offered since the mid-1980s at two Iowa greyhound tracks. One track is Council Bluffs and is operated by Horseshoe Casino, while the other track is in Dubuque and is run by Mystique Casino. The Iowa Legislature last session considered, but didn't approve, a proposal to end live greyhound racing in Iowa in exchange for the two tracks making payments to the state. The payments would have represented the millions of dollars each racetrack casinos shift from their casino operations each year to subsidize money-losing greyhound races.

Iowa lawmakers are expected this year to again consider ending greyhound racing, and a bill on the issue will be discussed Thursday in the Iowa Senate State Government Committee.

Opponents of greyhound racing contend it's inhumane and they point out that wagering on Iowa dog races has plunged by more than 90 percent over the past two decades. Only a handful of patrons can be typically found attending greyhound races, which are subsidized by millions of dollars from racetrack slot machines. That's money that could be better used by Iowa community foundations, racing foes contend.

Greyhound industry lobbyists have strongly opposed efforts to shut down greyhound

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racing. Greyhound racing supports more than 1,300 jobs in Iowa with more than 350 owners and 70 farms in 30 Iowa counties, industry officials said. The industry generates millions of dollars annually for rural Iowa that is spent on farm supplies, veterinary services and other expenses, officials said.

Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K USA, said today it's always difficult to predict how state lawmakers will proceed on legislation, but he's feeling optimistic the Iowa Legislature will agree this session to end dog racing in Iowa. Animal advocacy groups nationally are joining with Iowa dog lovers and anti-gambling activists in a statewide campaign to shut down the state's dog racing industry.

"My sense is that this has a real chance of passage," Theil said.

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