

# Charleston Daily Mail

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## Perhaps W.Va. should reconsider dog racing

Casinos should be allowed to shed activity that doesn't work for them

The greyhound racing business is on its last legs. Wagers are down at the tracks because easier forms of betting offer more immediate gratification.

The industry also is plagued by accusations of cruelty. The Grey2K USA group, which opposes dog racing, reported that in 2011, a total of 855 greyhound injuries were reported to the West Virginia Racing Commission, leading to the deaths of 40 dogs.

In 38 states, commercial dog racing is illegal. Only seven states even have dog racing these days. Maybe it is time for West Virginia to make that six.

Since 2001, about half the nation's dog tracks - 26 - have closed.

This state's two dog tracks would have shut down 20 years ago were it not for the casino industry, which promised to prop up dog racing (as well as horse

racing in Chester and Charles Town) if the state let them add slot machines.

Animal racing was a fig leaf to mask the real goal - legalizing full-blown casino gambling, which the state has since done.

Most West Virginians were OK with turning animal racing tracks into casinos because the gambling tax revenues meant the state could spend more without raising taxes.

But now the casino industry nationwide is suffering from the recession and a glut of casinos. West Virginia racinos helped trigger the legalization of gambling in neighboring states, including Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Casino bankruptcies are on the rise and casino prices are falling. The Trump Plaza in Atlantic City just sold for \$20 million. The Donald spent \$210 million on its construction nearly 30 years ago.

Officials at the casino in Wheeling Park want to reduce the number of dog races it must hold. The West Virginia Kennel Owners Association opposes this, contending that the casino wants to phase out dog racing.

If so, why not allow that to happen? The market for dog racing is small, and the dogs themselves pay a high price for racing.

The kennel association took its case to the state

Racing Commission to get it to force Wheeling Park to hold more than 100 races each week.

"Racing is what the statute requires," said Phil Reale, the lawyer for the dog breeders. "If we don't want racing - which is what this is really about - let's change the law."

He's right.

The law should be changed, not necessarily to ban dog racing outright, but to allow the casinos to drop the fig leaf.