

Fred Barton: Why postpone the inevitable? End racing subsidies (Daily Mail)

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While it is encouraging that the West Virginia House and Senate Committees have both supported the bill to end the greyhound subsidy ([Bills to cut WV state greyhound funding advance, March 23](#)), now the entire Legislature must step up and do their jobs.

It seems unconscionable that in a state with as many fiscal challenges as West Virginia, the government allows \$15 million to flutter away each year in support of an industry that is the economic equivalent of the walking dead. Actually, as a technical point, I would not call funding 95 percent of the greyhound racing purse a subsidy. It's more like a bailout. It's tantamount to a car company coming to the state and saying, "No one is buying our cars so give us \$15 million to make more cars. And do it year after year after year."

Last week, Sen. John Unger, D-Berkeley, said he wanted to be sure the state wasn't "cannibalizing ourselves and putting ourselves deeper in the hole" by ending the subsidy purses ([WV Senate committee takes up bill to eliminate greyhound subsidy, March 14](#)).

Yet the state already gives the greyhound industry 95 percent of their purse funds. The hole can't get much deeper than that. He also said he wanted to be assured "'decoupling' greyhound racing from the casinos will not hurt overall attendance, since the racetracks make the two casinos distinctive from the dozens of competing 'stand-alone' casinos in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maryland."

Unger and other legislators need only look at Florida. If you go there you will see the poker rooms packed, but the dog track right outside looks like an abandoned ruin. People who gamble like casino style gambling. They could care less that there is dog racing nearby.

Steve Sarras, president of the West Virginia Kennel Owners Association, makes the argument that jobs will be lost, but that need not be the case. Workers can be retrained for the casino side of the business and the proper redevelopment of the tracks can lead to more and better jobs. The state can and should see to a soft landing for track employees in the legislation as the government/casino partnership in Iowa did.

The best argument for dropping the subsidy comes from the industry itself. In an earlier article Mr. Sarras said, "If they decouple, I can tell you right now it is not cost effective to race in West Virginia." Think about that for a minute. What Mr. Sarras is saying is that without the state coughing up 95 percent of the purse funds, they can't make it. What clearer indication is there than a high official in the greyhound racing industry saying that racing is dead without a government handout?

And yes, I know that the subsidy isn't direct tax dollars from the citizens, but rather from the casinos. But do you think the Legislature is just going to let the casinos keep that money if the subsidy ends? Hardly.

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