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FLORIDA'S GREYHOUND GAMBIT IS DECOUPLED FROM REALITY

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Greyhound racing in toto is every bit as cruel as dog fighting. Underperforming dogs are killed, animals die while racing—three per day in Florida—and many perish from inhumane living conditions, overbreeding and injuries obtained on the track. Female racers are pumped full of anabolic steroids to interrupt their estrus cycle, and goose performance. A female who is a good racer is rewarded with a lifetime of breeding, confined to a cage that she can barely stand up in. Even the “best” kennels are known for caging as much as 22 hours a day, feeding racers a diet of foul meat mixed with charcoal.

With all of this pain and suffering you'd think there's a hugely profitable market for greyhound racing, but you'd be wrong. All tracks lose money in this dying industry. Everyone agrees dog racing's days are numbered. The only question is how many dogs will die in the meantime.

With that in mind, it's simply astounding that the Florida House wants to force this practice to continue for another 20 years. Alexandra Glorioso of Southwest Florida's New-Press.com does a great job of summing-up the complicated history of greyhound racing in Florida:

“Florida began its foray into a complicated gaming system in 1931 when it legalized ‘betting among ourselves,’ or pari-mutuels, in the form of live events such as jai alai matches, and horse and greyhound racing. Since then, every step to expand gambling across the state has been legislatively linked to these live events.”

In other words, greyhound racing is an artificial industry propped up by Florida laws that are as out of touch with the 21st Century as telegrams. These laws force gambling halls to run 100 live events a year in order to offer card games. Seems like a lot of trouble for a few games of poker.

The last weeks of legislative session will be pivotal in determining if Florida will join the rest of the civilized world and allow gambling joints the ability to get out of the business of dog racing. A bill originating in the Senate (SB 8) sponsored by Sen. Bill Galvano of Bradenton, would permit gambling halls to decouple live events such as dog racing from card tables.



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Greyhounds spend as much as 22 hours a day in cage, average size: 32" high, 31" wide, 42" deep.

And in the other corner is a House bill (H 7037) sponsored by Rep. Mike La Rosa, a chair of the tourism and gaming subcommittee from St. Cloud, that *forbids decoupling* of dog racing from other forms of gambling for 20 more years.

The Florida legislature just convened a House and Senate committee on gambling chaired by Sen. Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton) to seek agreement on gambling in the state. Both houses are said to be highly motivated to come to an agreement on a policy approach that will allow the state to profit from Seminole Tribe gambling. Punting on this decision could cost the state more than \$120 million each year in gambling revenue.

Also on the slate for consideration is **Carlos Guillermo Smith's** anti-steroid bill, **which seems to be performing quite well**. He introduced his legislation with bipartisan support, and has many supporters who understand that the World's Tourist Destination is better off without also being known as one of the last places on earth that encourages the institutionalized cruelty of greyhound racing. Even the most casual observer can see that legalized cheating shouldn't be allowed in sport. We don't allow anabolic steroids for human athletic competition—why give a pass to the gambling industry?

Given the importance of these issues that affecting our brand as a state, as well as our collective conscience, it's distressing to know that Florida's Democratic Party accepted a \$10,000 donation from the Jacksonville Kennel Club. Maybe JKC has an interest in decoupling. Perhaps not. But if Democrats turn their back on greyhound racing reform, the question will be: whose interest were they serving?

Either way, it's fascinating to watch emerging bipartisan agreement that dogs shouldn't be tortured with performance-enhancing drugs, while also possibly extending *the larger cruelty of mandating racing for a generation-spanning, 20 additional years*. It's conceivable that Florida lawmakers could agree that dogs shouldn't endure doping, while mandating industrialized cruelty through prolonged dog racing.



Florida maintains its wholesome image...by killing greyhounds.

Carlos' bill deserves unanimous approval, it's the least we can do to improve the lives of these creatures. But we have to ask, "*what's the vision here*"? Lawmakers who vote to end doping have a values-based position only insofar as they also oppose mandated racing.

It's long been assumed that the state's corporate tourism interests (cough, Disney, cough) have been behind anti-gambling efforts that perpetuate dog racing. Pressure is applied through dark money groups, so no one can say for sure who is behind the atrocity that is the House bill. Perhaps someone should step up and say definitely that their corporate entity opposes animal cruelty and H 7037. Marrying greyhound racing to other forms of gambling has served long enough as an interstitial gambling regulation. Let's cultivate a true "family-friendly" environment for visitors that encourages the end of legalized dog torture.

It's pants-on-head crazy to think we're protecting Florida's wholesome image through the practice of animal cruelty.



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We can walk and chew gum at the same time. Promote an authentic family-friendly environment by decoupling dog racing from card games, *and then regulate the remaining forms of gambling for minimal harm.*

Decoupling greyhound racing from other forms of gambling doesn't outlaw racing. Rather it allows the market to decide if dog racing is right for the business owner. Instead of being forced to lose money on races nobody watches, owners could carry on

with games that don't trade in animal cruelty.

We can't continue hiding our gambling habit behind greyhound racing.

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