

## Bill to end dog racing advances in Senate

By David Pitt, The Associated Press

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DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A bill that would end greyhound racing in Council Bluffs but allow dog owners to continue operating a track in Dubuque was placed on the legislative fast-track Thursday.

Casinos in the two towns spent \$10 million subsidizing dog racing last year, and say the industry is dying as fewer people bet on dogs. Increasing criticism of the treatment of dogs from animal activist groups has accelerated the decline.

Sen. Jeff Danielson, D-Cedar Falls, said talk about ending dog racing in Iowa has been ongoing for about 15 years. The dog track in Waterloo, the area he represents, closed 20 years ago and remains vacant.

"The economics of greyhound racing itself have been a topic for a number of years and it's become more pointed because of the rapid decline in participation," he said. "It's not unique to Iowa. It's an issue other states have struggled with."

Thirty-seven dog tracks have closed in the United States since 2001, according to GREY2K, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending greyhound racing. About 21 tracks remain open in seven states, 12 in Florida, the group said.

It's estimated that more than 2,000 dogs are either racing or in training to race in Iowa.

Lawmakers told the casinos and the greyhound breeders early this year to negotiate a deal. Iowa strictly licenses and regulates horse racing at a track in Altoona and dog racing at the Dubuque and Council Bluffs tracks.

The bill, which was scheduled to be considered by the Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday, spends no taxpayer dollars but allows the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission to oversee some of the wind-down in Council Bluffs. Racing there would end on Dec. 31, 2015.

Under the bill, Mystique Casino in Dubuque would pay \$7 million and Horseshoe Casino in Council Bluffs casino would pay \$65 million into a fund totaling about \$72 million. Half of that money, \$36 million, would be used for a retirement fund to pay owners and breeders who chose to quit racing and to set up no-kill adoption shelters to care for and find homes for the retired race dogs.

The other \$36 million will be used to help the Iowa Greyhound Association lease the dog racing track in Dubuque and attempt to keep greyhound racing alive in Iowa. The current racing arrangement with the Dubuque casino would end in October. The greyhound association would then negotiate a five-year lease for the track and begin running it; the group would have an optional five-year extension.

Jim Carney, an attorney representing the Council Bluffs casino, said negotiating a "soft landing" or retirement fund for the dog owners and breeders is unprecedented.

Don Avenson, who represents the greyhound association, said the ethical treatment of dogs is a priority of the organization.

"We want everything done so that these dogs are treated properly," he said.

Avenson said the deal helps Iowa's 50 farms, 300 owners and 29 kennels continue their livelihood. The industry has said it employs about 1,200 people in the state.

"Dependent on those and all the other economic activity that revolves around this industry are small towns," he said. "They are in rural areas where people run these facilities with the lumber, hardware, veterinary services provided locally."

If the committee approves the bill, it will be eligible for Senate floor debate. The session is in its last days.