

Last-ditch horse, dog racing offer gains no ground in Kansas

Sen. Powell's bid to dial up bill met with opposition from House

Posted: [April 30, 2016](#) - 7:07pm

By **Tim Carpenter**

timothy.carpenter@cjonline.com

Activity to close out the 2016 legislative session took an unexpected turn Saturday when a negotiator unleashed the idea of making a fresh run at modifying Kansas gaming law to make it easier to rebuild the horse and dog racing industry.

Sen. Larry Powell, R-Garden City, requested House and Senate conferees take up legislation to alter financial requirements in state law for operation of gambling facilities that featured racing and slot machines at tracks. Since the state moved to open a maximum of four casinos in 2007, tracks devoted to greyhound and horse racing closed.

During a meeting on pending legislation with Rep. Sharon Schwartz, a Washington Republican and other House negotiators on agriculture issues, the topic of gambling reform was raised by Powell.

"As we were completing the committee work, Sen. Powell said he had another issue he'd like to bring up," Schwartz said. "He said there had been a lot of work done on gaming. He said that's really related to agriculture. It is a big industry in the state of Kansas. So, that was thrown out there."

Schwartz said she declined to entertain the offer by Powell to wade into legislation expanding opportunities to restore dog and horse racing in the state. She hasn't opened a packet of information outlining the proposal shared by the senator, and Powell said he wasn't well-versed in the changes that gambling lobbyists urged him to seek.

"At this point in time, I'm not going to do anything on it," Schwartz said. "It's an issue that needs to have been settled and worked a long time ago."

For several years, there have been attempts to reduce the state's share of receipts from gambling at racetracks to make those operations more economically viable for investors.

Opposition from existing Kansas casino operators and from general skeptics of gaming to any reform of state law has proven more persuasive than arguments raised by special interests tied to the horse and dog industries.

Schwartz said she was interested in gaining traction in the Senate for a three-part bill that included regulations allowing a south-central Kansas wildlife business to make use of infant animals in petting exhibitions, name a southeast Kansas buffalo herd for the late Rep. Bob Grant and permit crop research on the potential of industrial hemp.

In the Senate on Friday, Powell failed to gain approval of the bill containing revision to wildlife petting restrictions. He said he had decided not to bring the Grant naming legislation to the Senate floor.

Plans to return dog or horse racing to slot-machine tracks has proven controversial in the House during the 2016 session. An attempt to engage the House in a debate during March on a bill suitable for amendment with horse and dog racing language led House Speaker Ray Merrick, R-Stilwell, to strip a chairman of his committee assignment.

Rep. John Rubin, a Republican from Shawnee, had sought a gaming debate in the House. His effort was blocked and Merrick removed him as chairman of the House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee. Rubin considered resigning from the House, but stopped at denouncing the speaker's leadership style.

"The speaker viewed his election as speaker as akin to making him King of Kansas," Rubin said. "He believes that no bill should ever emanate from the House that he doesn't personally approve of and support, and I think that's wrong."

Merrick said conflict over return of gambling on dogs and horses went beyond politics to potential violation of contracts the state signed with developers of casinos. A nonbinding legal opinion by Attorney General Derek Schmidt affirmed Merrick's apprehension about tinkering with the Kansas Expanded Lottery Act.

"There are a number of legal problems regarding our contracts with state-owned casino managers and the high likelihood of the state losing hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties if those contracts are broken," Merrick said.

Casino facilities have opened in Dodge City, Mulvane and Kansas City, Kan., with only the southeast Kansas gaming zone unoccupied by a casino. In 2014, state lawmakers lower the investment requirements in the last gaming zone to encourage opening of a casino in southeast Kansas.

Tim Carpenter can be reached at (785) 295-1158 or timothy.carpenter@cjonline.com. Follow Tim on Twitter [@TimVCarpenter](https://twitter.com/TimVCarpenter). Read [Tim's blog](#).

— Similar stories from CJOnline.com

Letter: Kansas should
ban dog racing
May 18, 2016

Letter: Bring back
horse, greyhound
racing and the jobs
with them
May 10, 2016



Kansas Senate panel
approves bill to revive
KCK dog, horse racing
park
May 13, 2015

Letter: Bringing dog
racing back nothing
but a subsidy scheme
Apr 05, 2016

For first time in 6
years, no drought on
Kansas map
May 21, 2016

Letter: Dog racing is
damaging to animals
and revenue
Apr 11, 2016



Senate bill offers tax
incentive to restart
horse racing
Mar 05, 2015

[Back to Top](#)



The Topeka Capital-Journal ©2016. All Rights Reserved.

[User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Copyright Notice](#) [Contact Us](#)

