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## End Dog, Horse Race Subsidies

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When coal companies fall on hard times, they cannot ask the state of West Virginia for subsidies. Neither can steel mills, aluminum smelters, chemical plants, grocery stores, automobile dealerships - or any other business.

Except for the dog and horse racing industries. They rake in gigantic subsidies from the state.

A national organization critical in many ways of greyhound racing, Grey2K, has issued a report that once again focuses attention on the subsidies. Subsidies for dog racing are "a misuse of taxpayer money," Grey2K President Christine Dorchak commented.

Such criticism makes those involved in dog and horse racing bristle - but, as they say, the truth hurts.

West Virginia's four racetracks, two for dogs and two for horses, are required by law to offer racing if they want to be involved in machine and table gambling. A substantial amount of the proceeds from those forms of gambling is raked off to subsidize the racing industry.

Last year alone, \$77 million of the proceeds from gambling went to purse funds to pay winners at the racetracks. Another \$15 million went to thoroughbred and greyhound breeders through "development" funds.

At the same time money is siphoned off to support racing, the state's "cut" of bets placed on dogs and horses has declined.

In 1993, the total amount bet on racing at the state's tracks was nearly \$270 million, with the state receiving \$7.4 million of that. But by last year, with a total of \$613 million bet, the state got a measly \$2.1 million.

Without the massive subsidies their industry receives, horse and dog racing probably could not survive in West Virginia, those involved warn. That would jeopardize thousands of jobs, they add.

Perhaps so. But many business people in other industries could use some help, too. But state law does not provide subsidies for them.

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and legislators should take another look at the rotten system of diverting gambling revenue to prop up the racing industry. It should be stopped, as soon as possible.

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