

# The Intelligencer.

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### Stop Subsidizing Racing in W.Va.

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By THE INTELLIGENCER , The Intelligencer / Wheeling News-Register

Give those involved in the dog- and horse-racing industries one thing: They are excellent self-promoters. For years they were able to convince legislators in 20 states to subsidize their sports.

Efforts to do away with the subsidies are rejected, year after year. Here in West Virginia, legislators last winter had a plan to eliminate subsidies for dog racing, but it was turned back.

In many states, including ours, the subsidies come courtesy of both casino and machine gambling operations. Percentages of the take are raked off and handed to the racing industries in the form of purse funds to bolster cash awards to the owners of winning dogs and horses. In some states, also including West Virginia, breeders of racing horses and dogs are subsidized the same way.

At one point, nearly \$90 million a year in gambling proceeds was going to the dogs (and horses) in the Mountain State. As legislators scrambled during recent years to balance budgets, the subsidies have been reduced.

And West Virginia has not been alone in doing that. According to an Associated Press report, officials in other states have cut or plan to reduce subsidies. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie in 2011 eliminated \$30 million in subsidies poured into racing from casinos in Atlantic City.

Much of the sales pitch dog- and horse-racing interests used to gain their subsidies in the first place was a plea to prop up declining businesses and thus preserve jobs.

But here in West Virginia and in other states, many types of businesses have suffered during recent years. No one offers a cut of the casino take to the coal industry. No one suggested preserving Ohio Valley steel mills might be worth diverting a few million dollars from gambling machines instead of letting it flow where it belongs - to the state treasury.

Look for legislators to try again on reducing or eliminating racing subsidies early next year. Perhaps similar consideration in other states will boost their resolve as the racing interests once again warn of doom and gloom if the support is cut. If it takes a bandwagon effect to make the long-overdue change in West Virginia, so be it. We've been spending tens of millions of dollars on a bad bet for too long.