

Political Fix Florida

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Amendment gives controversial greyhound “decoupling” new life

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A push to clamp down on greyhound racing may have a second chance after it was blocked earlier this session.

State Sen. Eleanor Sobel, D-Hollywood, has filed an amendment that would no longer require dog tracks to have races in order to continue to operate much more profitable card rooms and slot machines. Known as “decoupling,” the issue has stirred much debate.

The idea is backed by a powerful trio: Senate President Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, his son –state Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Shalimar, and his wife, Vickey.

Earlier this month, the three were at a press conference pushing for passage of “decoupling” and attended a meeting when a previous decoupling amendment was withdrawn in the Senate Gaming Committee due to lack of support.

With the Gaetz family vocally in support of decoupling, it’s likely to be a negotiating chip moving into the final weeks of the legislative session. There is not yet similar language filed on the House side.

Supporters of the measure say that greyhound racing is cruel to the dogs, while opponents of decoupling see an attempt for track owners to convert their gaming permits.

One thing is clear: greyhound racing is not profitable.

A report commissioned by the Legislature found that industry revenue in Florida decreased by 67 percent between 1990 and 2012.

Sobel’s amendment will be considered Tuesday by the Senate Appropriations Committee. The underlying bill, SB 742, requires that track owners report deaths and injuries to racing animals.

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