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## Email Entropy

### Racing correspondence reveals a conflicted agency

by [Tim Vanderpool](#)

On rare occasions, mere citizens gain a glimpse behind the curtain, allowing us to see how government really works.

Just such a peek occurred recently, when the Weekly obtained cozy email correspondence between members of the Arizona Racing Commission and Tucson Greyhound Park. The emails were procured through a public records request by Massachusetts anti-racing group Grey2K USA.

There have long been accusations that the Racing Commission—and the Arizona Department of Racing, for which it sets policy—are more like drinking buddies than stern taskmasters when it comes to monitoring South Tucson's greyhound track. That impression was only boosted when state lawmakers recently yanked department funding, forcing the ADOR to rely solely on revenues from the very racing industry it's charged with overseeing.

This might be a driver behind recent regulatory quirks, such as the fact that ADOR stewards no longer collect dog injury reports from Tucson Greyhound Park. This keeps those unsightly records outside the scope of public records requests—and beyond public scrutiny.

The desire for obfuscation seems obvious, since lousy track conditions recently contributed to nearly 70 dog injuries in just two months. And what did the ADOR do about it? Not much, beyond issuing a few harsh words.

The roots of this unseemly symbiosis date from November 2008, when the citizens of South Tucson voted to outlaw the track's practice of feeding greyhounds with raw meat from diseased animals. Their ballot initiative also forbade the dosing of female greyhounds with anabolic steroids. The steroids keep females from going into heat, but are also believed to cause severe health problems.

Ever since, track officials have done their best to weasel out of those restrictions. For instance, they claim to now cook the foul meat. And for a time, the dogs were hauled just beyond South Tucson's city limits before a veterinarian injected them with steroids.

When the Weekly reported on these surreptitious injections, the track veterinarian simply relocated his operation. But the hide-and-seek was halted in September, when Ward 6 City Councilman Steve Kozachik spearheaded a measure prohibiting the injections throughout Tucson. Pima County followed suit in January.

But it appears that Greyhound Park manager Tom Taylor knew last spring where things were headed. "Do you have any suggestions as to how we can beat this?" he wrote in a May 7 email to ADOR Director Bill Walsh and Racing Commissioner Rory Goreé. "My plan is to approach South Tucson City Council for an exemption or a grandfather clause."

In a follow-up email to Walsh, Commissioner Goreé waxed indignant. "First they went after birth control hormones, the food the greyhounds are fed and now this," the commissioner wrote. "I believe city and county ordinances are pre-empted by state law and regulation."

Goreé then urged Walsh to check with the Arizona Attorney General's Office. "I would like to see this resolved as expediently as possible," he wrote, "as I believe ... 'harassment' of TGP will continue using city and county ordinances to drive up the expenditures of a legal, regulated business from operating that is under regulatory authority of the state and not local authorities."

In an interview with the Weekly, Walsh said he took no action on Goreé's request. And the AG's office says it was not contacted on this matter.

While Goreé did not return numerous emails and phone calls from the Weekly, his penchant for online verbosity is impressive. His blog regularly savages groups opposed to greyhound racing. And in March, he sent a lengthy article to Walsh describing how groups like Grey2K will leverage dog-track injuries to end the sport.

This recalls a similar dust-up last year when, as a newly appointed commissioner, Goreé publicly apologized after making vulgar sexual references to Grey2K president Christine Dorchak on his Facebook page.

Carey Theil is Grey2K's executive director. To him, the emails signal an agency that has lost its way. "When you have a racing commissioner openly strategizing with track executive Tom Taylor about how to defeat a local ordinance," Theil says, "I think it's very clear that the commission is effectively protecting Tucson Greyhound Park instead of regulating the track."

But Goreé is not alone. When informed by the ADOR of Grey2K's records request, fellow Commissioner Melvin McDonald was disdainful. "I do not recall any Greyhound messages or emails," McDonald wrote to the department on Jan. 3. "If I got any, I would have discarded them. It seems like almost all emails or letters I get fall into the kook categories."

McDonald's term expired a few weeks later. But considering that he served as the U.S. attorney for Arizona in the 1980s, critics say he certainly should have known better than to simply ditch emails from the public.

Susan Via is a retired federal prosecutor and the driving force behind South Tucson 2008 greyhound initiative. She says McDonald's comments "shows utter contempt for Arizonans with whom he may disagree. ... Apparently he never bothered to read the AZ state open records laws, nor the case law interpreting them."

But when contacted by the Weekly, McDonald hedged. "I get emails all the time," he says. "We're talking about emails that come directly into my account. I get so much garbage that I discard. ...The response speaks for itself."

Then come the emails that weren't surrendered in Grey2K's public request. They included terse exchanges last fall between Director Walsh and Councilman Kozachik. The councilman, a steadfast critic of Greyhound Park, invited Walsh to meet him at the Ward 6 office while the director was in Tucson for a seminar. But those plans hit a snag soon after Kozachik also invited Susan Via.

"I understood the purpose of the meeting was to inform [Kozachik] on some of the issues he raised," Walsh wrote to the Ward 6 staff. "While Ms. Via may have an interest in the greyhound industry, I'm uncertain how she fits into this discussion."

Kozachik's response was tart. "The Arizona Department of Racing has been a taxpayer-subsidized oversight agency," he wrote to Walsh, "that is charged with monitoring the activities of TGP, among other racing venues, each of which also receive tax subsidies. Ms. Via is a taxpayer, and has been active in ensuring the welfare of the animals at the TGP is respected appropriately. On all levels, she 'fits into this discussion.'"

Not surprisingly, the meeting with Kozachik never happened. "I offered him a number of opportunities," Walsh told the Weekly by phone. "But he only had one way of doing it, so it didn't work out."

Kozachik describes an agency that resists being dragged into the light—or clashing with businesses paying its way. "There's no reason for them to be aggressive about looking at the track conditions or looking into the injury rates," he says. "Walsh and the whole ADOR—they're not an objective oversight group. It's a direct conflict."