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Editorial

'Decoupling' bill on dog races a solid bet

THE ISSUE: Measure would end dog racing requirement

*April 23, 2011*

Dog racing is a fading business, pummeled by increasing public opposition to the "sport" and the reality that gamblers would rather bet on something other than [dogs](#) running around in circles.

To the chagrin of canine activists, but with the consent of Florida voters and a constitutional amendment, the greyhound racing industry has been able to remain afloat, largely through the addition of casinos, card rooms and other, more lucrative forms of gambling.

The tracks are back in Tallahassee this year. But this time, the effort by the industry and its lobbyists to prop up sagging profits is being applauded by some unconventional allies — animal rights activists. With good reason.

Video: Disabled man attacked on bus; suspect sought

Legislation making its way through the [Florida Legislature](#) would end the requirement that dog tracks have live races if they want to keep their card games and other betting operations. It's sensible and practical to do so.

Of course, the link between the races and other gambling was a self-preservation effort by the racing industry. It dates back to the 1990s, when the tracks won the right to expand into card betting, but did so in a way that competitors could not open stand-alone casinos or card rooms without a dog track.

Now the live races are biting the industry's own hand, hemorrhaging profits because of the cost of maintaining the dogs and a downward spiral that has seen bets on dog races drop by 69 percent in the past 20 years, according to the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation's Division of Pari-mutuel Wagering.

So SB 1594 and HB 1145, at their root, may be about gambling profits, but they have an undeniably humane benefit. "Decoupling" the live races requirement from the operation of card rooms and casinos would help hundreds if not thousands of greyhounds by allowing the marketplace, not the law, to dictate how often, and whether, dogs will be raced live.

And with wagers on the races continuing to drop off, it's a safe bet that the state's 13 dog tracks — three of them in South Florida — will significantly curtail dog racing. That will please animal rights activists, and it's a sound business move for a state that has a stake in the pari-mutuels' success.

It's a rare day when the greyhound tracks and animal rights activists are on the same side, and it's a sign that this legislation is a winner.

BOTTOM LINE: This measure is a safe bet.