

Because I'm an animal lover, I am against industries that make a profit from live animals. Dog racing is one of those. The appeal of greyhound racing is declining as has been shown in the historical closure of facilities and in states opting to make dog racing illegal. There must be good reason. Greyhound racing has not proven economically beneficial anywhere.

Starting in the 1990s, states began to repeal live dog racing laws and by early 2016, 40 states had passed racing prohibitions. All dog racing parks in Kansas are owned by Phil Ruffin and even though all are closed, Kansas is one of the few states remaining where tracks are legal.

From 2001 to 2006, new gambling legislation was proposed in Kansas every year and every year it failed. In 2007, the Kansas Expanded Lottery Act passed allowing for Kansas to own and operate casinos in four zones. In the south central zone, Sedgwick County voted against the casino and slot machines in north Wichita and as a result, the Wichita Greyhound Park owned by Phil Ruffin closed in October and remains closed. This act allowed for Kansas to negotiate a 15-year contract in each of the four gaming zones with a destination casino management company. In 2008, the review board selected Harrahs for south central Kansas but withdrew siting economic downturn. From 2008 - 2015, the Kansas Gaming Commission took applications and ultimately, Sumner County approved the opening of the Kansas Star in 2011. Derek Schmidt commented in April of 2016 that allowing placement of slot machines at a Wichita racetrack facility would violate the state contract with the operating casino and state law. He said courts would likely block a law allowing for a revote in Sedgwick County because the casino management firm would have a strong claim for losses. The contracts were written with the intent there would be no other gaming facilities with slot machines in the state until at least 2032. The Kansas Star paid a privilege fee to be the sole gaming facility in the zone. If Ruffin gets approval to move forward, the state could be held liable for damages and the repayment of a \$25 million privilege fee.

With racing parks in Kansas closed due to documented low attendance and financial loss, it appears the public is losing interest. Based on research, I believe it is for two reasons: first, this type of entertainment is out of step with the times. Dog racing began in the early 1900s in California and in the mid 1900s in Kansas, with farmers using dogs to control rabbit populations. Phil Ruffin Jr. admitted to the media that greyhound racing has struggled. "The interest in racing has dwindled because it's easier for people to go in and play video poker and slot machines." I believe as Phil Ruffin Jr. does, that, in 2018, most people today are attracted to technologically savvy virtual sports. Many innovative computer generated betting and gaming opportunities are widely available. I would like to recommend Phil Ruffin take the money he's willing to invest and look at technological alternatives such as virtual racing to pair with slot machines. He has a community of creative thinkers and entrepreneurs here in Wichita to tap for ideas on how to make a bigger, better gambling experience. The second reason I think the public has lost interest in dog racing is, with the advent of social media, our eyes now go where they couldn't go before. People see inhumane treatment and abuses of humans and animals alike. The secrecy behind industries that use animals for entertainment can no longer be hidden. In the cases of abuse, whether human or animal - any living thing - it becomes emotional and people begin taking action. They vote, at the ballot box and with their wallet. It seems obvious in Kansas that live animal racing is not where the public wants to spend their entertainment dollar today.

Phil Ruffin wants greyhound racing revived in Kansas so privately owned slot machines can be returned. Ruffin has financial roots in Las Vegas and continues to lobby for gaming, despite failed earlier attempts.

Patronage at greyhound parks has plummeted yet this industry and its allies, primarily greyhound breeders, repeatedly beg the legislature to reopen the tracks and allow slot machines for profit to subsidize the racing. Tax revenues are the enticement yet in the few states where slot machines have been introduced, they also bring a host of social problems, a risk of corruption, and a never-ending stream of hundreds of thousands of stranded, abandoned, abused dogs that are then left to be dealt with by already overburdened shelters and rescues. When those channels are exhausted, the dogs are euthanized and not always in a humane manner. Wichita shelters and rescues have reached a crisis point with dogs already. The consequences of adding more animals to this taxed support system will be devastating for animals and for the compassionate humans who must deal with the fallout.

Greyhounds are excluded from K.S.A. 47-1701, the Pet Animal Act. Greyhounds are not protected from abuse like companion animals. They are viewed as a commodity. There is no federal law to correct this either. A former Kansas trainer/kennel owner admitted to killing over 1500 dogs in a 15-year time frame. He weighed the value of retraining against killing the 'slow' dogs. Usually, dogs are shot in the head and dumped in a mass grave for that purpose. If the dog is defective in any way - and hundreds are when compared to those deemed 'winners' - the breeders don't want them anymore. They don't want to pay a \$20 per head euthanasia fee so the dogs are simply disposed of. These mass graves have been discovered in various parts of the country, sometimes across state lines from the states where racing is still allowed, with ears cut off so they cannot be traced. The Arizona Republic, Fox News, The New York Times have all broken stories about cases where hundreds if not thousands of unwanted, 'imperfect' dogs are shot in the head and buried. Kennel owners felt it was expedient and humane. Because these dogs are a commodity and not protected, all but the Champions are used and thrown away. In contrast, disposing of companion dogs in this manner is the highest level of misdemeanor in Sedgwick County with the highest fine allowed.

Repeated attempts by gambling interests to expand have failed in part because of conflicts within their own industry. This is an industry built on greed and profit, with an appalling exploitation of animals in the process. The gambling interests are attempting to entice the state with slot machines to prop up a dying form of entertainment. In December of 2003, members of the governor's committee on expanded gambling said slot machines and casinos are possible sources of revenue and they proposed approval of state owned machines. Phil Ruffin opposed this. According to some sources, he stands to make millions but only if he owns and operates the machines. He is now returning to propose the reopening of the greyhound racing track - once again - in order to streamline his desire for slot machines.

I ask our state representatives to vote no to bring back dog racing and instead, be forward thinking. Research the less than pretty side of dog racing. Behind every champion are litters of dogs deemed flawed. If we must provide a gambling outlet to satisfy a need in our state, let's look to proven solutions instead of looking backwards at failed ones. Let's look to innovations in the gambling industry and tap into the creative talents and resources that exist in our city and our state for development. Phil Ruffin is a well-known, wealthy, and influential business man in Wichita. The Abilene greyhound community is large and powerful in Kansas. I suggest it is time to look to the future and evaluate ways everyone can move away from a sport that perpetuates the suffering of living things and move towards something where everyone benefits and where no harm is done.

Please OPPOSE HB 2545.

Respectfully,  
Shelly Bonnell, Wichita, KS