



Legislative briefs

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Lindsay A. Miller / Arizona Daily Star 2006

Under the bill, Tucson Greyhound Park will be allowed to conduct off-track betting without live greyhound racing.

Dog racing

Without dissent, the Senate on Monday ratified a plan that will end dog racing in Arizona at the end of this year.

The deal in HB 2127 will allow Tucson Greyhound Park to keep its exclusive right to operate all the off-track betting facilities in Southern Arizona for two years after it no longer has live racing. But during that time it must pay a horseman's group 20 percent of the fees it now gets from Turf Paradise for carrying its live signal — and taking wagers — in Southern Arizona.

After that, HB 2127 permits Turf Paradise to open its own OTB facilities in the area to take wagers on horse racing, not only from its own track but across the nation. The deal was hailed by animal rights groups who have argued that greyhound racing is cruel and that animals who cannot win are routinely destroyed.

A final House vote will send the measure to the governor.

Free speech

State senators voted 21-8 to block universities and community colleges from limiting protests, distributing handbills and making speeches to only certain areas of the campus.

HB 2615 stems from concerns about branches of the Maricopa Community College system that have policies setting up so-called "free speech zones." There also are some requirements for prior approval.

At least one lawsuit is pending on the issue, against Paradise Valley Community College by two students who charge it is illegally requiring groups to get permits and provide prior notice. The college policy also restricts those who want to demonstrate or hand out literature to certain areas of campus.

"I think it is a disgrace that we have to craft a bill to protect First Amendment rights, not from thugs or political fanatics who are trying to suppress other people's rights," said Sen. John Kavanagh, R-Fountain Hills. "That a government college would suppress free speech with absurd laws is so embarrassing."

The measure now goes back to the House, which approved a different version of the measure.

Photo radar tickets

Starting next year, motorists can ignore photo radar tickets taped to their doors without worrying about losing the right to drive.

Current law says photo radar companies can offer "alternate service" if there is no one at the door to accept the citation. And failure to answer it — even if it blew away — leads to mandatory license suspension.

"The government thinks it's OK to tape that notice to your door and you're considered properly served," said Rep. Michelle Ugenti-Rita, R-Scottsdale. "A suspended license is no joke."

Her legislation, HB 2591, removes the ability of the Motor Vehicle Division to suspend a license if there is no proof the motorist has been properly served. That would also include first class mail where a recipient does not have to sign for it.

The measure gained preliminary Senate approval Monday and now needs a roll-call vote.

Gov't continuity

Preparing for the worst, the state House gave preliminary approval Monday to ensuring at least one state official survives if there's an attack on a major event.

SB 1156 says the secretary of state, attorney general or state treasurer must be absent from events like the annual State of the State address, the quadrennial swearing in of state elected officials or any similar event. Proponents said that ensures that someone in the official line of succession survives if the Capitol is the site of anything from a terrorist attack to a natural disaster. Lawmakers did agree to remove a provision requiring the Department of Public Safety to take the designated official at least 20 miles away at least three hours ahead of time. Now the measure leaves the details up to DPS.

A final House vote sends the measure back to the Senate to review the House changes.

Worker benefits

The Senate voted 18-11 Monday to deny cities and counties the right to tell private businesses they have to offer paid vacation or time off.

A 2006 voter-approved law that legislators cannot repeal specifically permits local governments to set minimum wages higher than the state mandate. HB 2579 is designed to preclude similar local laws on things like sick time and maternity leave. It is being pushed largely by the Arizona Restaurant and Hospitality Association.

Sen. Andrew Sherwood, D-Tempe, said the Republican-controlled Legislature should stay out of local issues. But Sen. Steve Smith, R-Maricopa, said it's sometime necessary for lawmakers to step in to keep local governments from infringing on private rights.

The House now needs to approve changes made by the Senate.

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