



(Photo: Special to the News Journal)

Carey Theil 1:13 p.m. CDT June 20, 2015

I am truly amazed at the double-face the Florida Greyhound Association, a lobby group that represents greyhound breeders, is trying to put on its actions during the legislative session that just ended. (Viewpoint, "Legislature did nothing to protect greyhounds," May 31.)

Greyhound breeders claim that they are "disappointed" the legislature didn't pass measures to help dogs. Who are they kidding? In reality, the FGA spent the last session fighting the most basic reforms, including a requirement that greyhound injuries be reported to the public. We already know that a racing dog dies every three days in Florida, on average, according to state records. Unfortunately we don't know how many greyhounds are being injured, in part because the FGA wants to keep this information secret.

At the same time the public is learning about the humane problems in the dog racing industry, the FGA has launched a public relations operation that amounts to nothing more than smoke and mirrors. It's worth noting that greyhound breeders have been racing dogs in the state since 1931, but it's only in the past few months that the FGA has expressed a sudden interest in greyhound welfare.

This publicity campaign is contrasted by the FGA's actual track record. For example, in 2012 we testified before the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, in favor of the first state regulations to protect the welfare of greyhounds. The FGA was nowhere to be seen, and it was absent again in February 2013 when the rule was formally considered and ultimately approved. Of course, actions speak louder than words. If the FGA is truly concerned about greyhounds, there are several changes it can make today to help these beautiful dogs.

First, its members can refuse to race dogs on the tracks that it publicly acknowledges are unsafe, until changes are made. We agree with the FGA that tracks should have guard rails on the device that dogs chase, and the electrical wiring that sometimes causes greyhounds to be electrocuted should be insulated. No responsible person would continue to race greyhounds on flawed tracks, yet greyhound breeders put their profits ahead of animal welfare when they enter a dog to compete under these conditions.

Second, the FGA can stop confining thousands of dogs in small cages for long hours each day. At Florida dog tracks, greyhounds are kept in warehouse-style kennels, in metal cages, for up to 23 hours a day. This is cruel and inhumane, and should end.

Third, the FGA can stop giving anabolic steroids to female greyhounds to prevent estrus. This is a reckless practice that can cause long-term health problems according to the industry's own literature. This is an industry short cut that harms animal welfare, while increasing the profit margin for a racing kennel.

Finally, the FGA can stop using "4-D" meat from downed animals as a primary food source. This meat is deemed unfit for human consumption, and according to the Food and Drug Administration is a "potential health hazard" to both greyhounds and their handlers. Again, this is used to reduce costs.

The FGA consistently ignores these humane problems, and tries to shift the blame onto racetrack owners by focusing on their failures. The bottom line is that the racing industry uses standard practices that go against our values, and it is slowly dying as a result.

While FGA spin doctors send out press releases, real animal protection groups like the ASPCA, Humane Society of the United States and GREY2K USA will continue pushing for actual change. These gentle dogs need real relief, not political posturing.

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