



Erie-Meadville District

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THOMAS L. FUNK, SUPERINTENDENT

1001 West 21st Street, Erie, PA 16502 • 814/454-5046

September 12, 1996

PUBLIC HEARING - SEPTEMBER 12, 1996

BEHREND CAMPUS, PENN STATE UNIVERSITY, ERIE, PA

MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MY NAME IS THOMAS L. FUNK. I AM A REGISTERED VOTER, RESIDENT OF PENNSYLVANIA AND A UNITED METHODIST PASTOR. I HOLD THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SUPERVISING (AS DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT) 93 CONGREGATIONS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN ERIE AND CRAWFORD COUNTIES, WHOSE MEMBERSHIP IS OVER 19,489 MEMBERS. I ALSO AM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF BISHOP GEORGE W. BASHORE, BISHOP OF THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. BISHOP BASHORE REPRESENTS OVER 940 CONGREGATIONS IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA WITH A COMBINED MEMBERSHIP TOTALING 207,407 MEMBERS. TRADITIONALLY, UNITED METHODISTS HAVE BEEN REGISTERED AND VOTING CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH. IT HAS BEEN OUR OFFICIAL AND HISTORIC STAND AS UNITED METHODISTS THAT:

"GAMBLING IS A MENACE TO SOCIETY, DEADLY TO THE BEST INTEREST OF MORAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SPIRITUAL LIFE, AND DESTRUCTIVE OF GOOD GOVERNMENT." PAGE 101 OF THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.

I COME, THEREFORE, OPPOSING ANY SPREAD OF GAMING (GAMBLING), BY THE STATE, COUNTY, OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT ACTION OF LEGISLATION IN PENNSYLVANIA. I AM ALSO OPPOSED TO ANY BILL AUTHORIZING GAMBLING CASINOS IN PENNSYLVANIA ON ITS RIVERS AND LAKES. MY OPPOSITION TO THIS BILL IS ON PRAGMATIC AS WELL AS MORAL GROUNDS. WE ARE TOLD BY THE INTERESTS THAT SUPPORT GAMBLING THAT IT IS A GOOD WAY OF RAISING REVENUE FOR OUR CITY, COUNTY AND STATE GOVERNMENT. WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT IT WILL CREATE MANY NEW JOBS AND BE OF ECONOMIC BENEFIT TO

OUR COMMUNITY AND ITS CITIZENS.

EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE NATION, ESPECIALLY IN ATLANTIC CITY, (AS REPORTED IN TIME MAGAZINE), WOULD GREATLY DISPUTE THESE CLAIMS. ALTHOUGH PROVIDING SOME ENTRY LEVEL JOBS, IT HAS HAD A LONG-TERM NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE RESTAURANTS, HOTELS AND RELATED BUSINESSES. THE OPENING OF THE CASINOS IN ATLANTIC CITY HAS NOT HELPED THEIR CITY OR COMMUNITY. MANY LOCAL RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS WERE CLOSED BECAUSE OF LACK OF BUSINESS. THE HIGH RATE OF CRIME AND POVERTY COMBINED WITH INCREASED COST OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES SURROUNDING THE CASINOS HAS ONLY RAISED THE BURDEN OF TAXATION UPON THE ORDINARY CITIZEN.

ANY TAX REVENUES THAT ARE GENERATED BY THE CASINO ARE EASILY OUT-SPENT BY THE NEGATIVE EXPENSES INCURRED IN THE COMMUNITY. ONE OF THE ADDITIONAL SIDE EFFECTS OF THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY IS NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONS ADDICTED TO GAMBLING. THESE PERSONS ARE COMPULSIVE GAMBLERS, UNABLE TO CONTROL THEIR ADDICTION. THE RESULTS OF SUCH ADDICTION ARE INCREASED COMMUNITY LIABILITIES. TREATMENT PLANS, LOSS OF JOBS, THE BREAKING UP OF FAMILIES AND LOSS OF PERSONAL SELF-WORTH, JUST TO NAME A FEW. STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT THE COMMUNITY COST IN ACTUAL DOLLOARS FAR OUT-WEIGHS ANY TAX ADVANTAGE OF HAVING THE GAMBLING CASINO INTERESTS IN OUR STATE AND CITY. IT WILL, FURTHERMORE, RAISE THE COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PERSONAL LOSSES AT A TIME THAT THE CITIZENS OF THIS STATE CAN ILL AFFORD.

YOU HAVE MY PROMISE THAT I WILL DO ALL IN MY POWER TO MARSHALL THE NEARLY ONE QUARTER OF A MILLION WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA UNITED METHODISTS TO OPPOSE LEGALIZING CASINO GAMBLING AND THE ELECTION OF EVERY LEGISLATOR WHO SUPPORTS IT.

IF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA REALLY NEEDS MORE TAX REVENUE, THOSE WHO REPRESENT US MUST ACT RESPONSIBLY AND ENACT FAIR AND EQUITABLE TAX LEGISLATION AND NOT DEPEND UPON THIS UNDERHANDED TAXING METHOD OF GAMBLING.

Thomas L. Funk