

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S PUBLIC HEARING

HOUSE BILL 2308
~ RIVERBOAT GAMBLING ~

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43 South Lake Street
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HB 2308 — RIVERBOAT GAMBLING

Thank you, members of the House Judiciary Committee for letting me share these thoughts regarding the expansion of gambling in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

I have asked for this opportunity to speak today in order to express my opposition to House Bill 2308 and any other Bills in the future that would promote or encourage gambling. I do so for many reasons but there are several that outweigh the rest. I am, in my occupation, as a Pastor called upon to respond to many challenges related to the preservation of individuals and families. In many instances, I am pleased to say that my work is a joy and it would appear at least that the vast majority of people I come in contact with are well adjusted, hard-working members of society.

But more and more I have noticed a quiet, growing undercurrent of troubled people trying to keep their lives and families together despite increasing pressures. While others here today will undoubtedly debate the financial side of this issue, I would rather keep a spot-light on the human cost involved with gambling. Although these two are tied together I am convinced that the human cost is far greater and more important. My hope is that we can keep the losses to an absolute minimum.

What are the losses I'm referring to? On a personal level, the American Psychiatric Association recognizes pathological gambling as a type of disorder that causes 3.5 to 5 per cent of those who "try it" to become so addicted to gambling that they lose control and escalate their wagers until their personal and financial lives are severely disrupted. Dr. Howard Schaffer, Director of Harvard Medical School's Division on addictions says, "These aren't people who are bad or weak or who lack a sense of personal responsibility, for them, gambling is a slippery slope," and unfortunately the deceptive nature of gambling is such that it generally convinces the "player" that their solution is not *quitting* gambling but rather *better* gambling".^①

1. William B. Falk, Newsday

Peter Keating, writing for "Money Magazine", told the story of "Andy" (not his real name), age 53, who "recalls all too well the wretched days back in 1990 when he realized his gambling addiction was out of control: 'I was stealing from my mother just to play the lottery.' " By the time he finally sought help, he had lost his job, his New Jersey home, his marriage and nearly his life.

In the 1970s and early '80s, Andy had been a successful electronics manufacturing executive and the owner of a disco. At his peak, from 1982 to 1984 he earned \$100,000 a year. But his real passion was the lottery, which he played compulsively every day for eight years. "I spent whatever I had, 50 cents or \$200 a day," he says. "I gambled on vacation, even on the day I had an emergency appendectomy. I wanted to win millions. Then I NEEDED to win millions." Andy remembers the first time he bought a lottery ticket in 1982. "I knew it was a sucker's bet" he says. "But no matter what else I did there was no other way I could make \$1 million for a buck." Instead, eight years and \$100,000 worth of lottery tickets later, Andy's disco business had collapsed and he was \$1 million in debt.^②

This is just one of many stories that could be told as is further evidenced by the documented "explosion" in various forms and opportunities for gambling. "Americans last year spent more on lottery games — \$34.4 billion — than they did on movie tickets, plays and all forms of recorded music combined. More Americans, 125 million, visited casinos than attended all Major League Baseball games and National League Football games.^③ This increased interest in getting *something for nothing* has created an ever-growing population that has received *nothing after giving everything*. There are now between six and ten million Americans who find gambling an adrenaline rush so seductive they cannot control how much they wager.

My concern is that just like any other sickness or disease the people affected and the problems created grow ever greater until something is done to slow and eventually stop

2. Peter Keating, Money Magazine

3. Robert Goodman, Professor of Urban Planning at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

or even reverse this disease. The Illinois State Police has reported a 316% increase in aggravated assaults in communities with Riverboat Casinos with a corresponding increase in other crimes such as robbery.

Many other statistics could be cited to raise concern levels about further growth in gambling opportunities but Nelson Rose, a law professor, at Whittier College and author of more than 100 scholarly articles on gambling said it best when stating that our country is in the early stages of an inevitable backlash. Throughout history, Rose says periods in which social prohibitions against gambling have been lifted have always been followed by corruption and social pain, and then by renewed restrictions.^④

Even as individual gamblers think the solution to their loss is “better gambling” so too we are on the verge of falling into the same trap. We think we can “do better gambling” than those other communities who have failed around us, but if we really want to “do better”, we will learn from the past and begin returning our country to that which is based on a “work ethic” not a “luck ethic”. A society that wants to solve the problems in education and care for the elderly with true compassion must do so through hard work, not by siphoning the financial life from the weak among us and creating a whole new series of problems. If we follow the present course of expanding gambling opportunities I and others in people-oriented/social service occupations will eventually be forced to pick up the pieces.

As a Pastor, I have tried to cooperate when able with every legitimate group and agency, both governmental and private, to see that our society remains as a place of safety and hope for everyone. My hope is that our elected officials will continue to cooperate in this as they have so many times in the past by recommending against the expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania.

Thank you,
Pastor Patrick Kennedy

4. Nelson Rose, Professor Law, Whittier College, CA