

Talking points of Bill Keisling  
Common Cause/PA's chairman of the Riverboat Gambling Project Team  
May 28, 1997  
before the Pennsylvania General Assembly's Judiciary Committee

We at Common Cause Pennsylvania are opposed to the expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania.

We've concluded that gambling is incongruous with good government, for a variety of reasons.

Studies repeatedly show that financial gains of gambling to a community are almost always smaller than promised by the gaming industry, and that the resulting added cost of infrastructure and social programs outweigh the small income generated.

One report by Maryland Attorney General J. Joseph Curran details the increase of crime associated with gaming industries. Compulsive gamblers often turn to crime to get their money back, or to get more money to gamble. Prostitution, loan sharking, theft and violent crime increase. In South Dakota, misdemeanors and felonies jumped 69 percent.

There are more surprising findings showing the costs to the fabric of society. Again in South Dakota, one local DA reports, "within two to three months (of gaming legalization), a 'main street typical of any small town was converted to a four-block strip of small casinos. Gone were the clothing and the shoe and the hardware and the grocery stores ... many of the necessities of life ... were no longer available in our town.'"

There are high and hidden costs. "Deadwood, South Dakota ... had no money to make the immediate necessary improvements to its water and sewage systems, parking facilities, and law enforcement. The municipal government ... (decided) to sell revenue bonds to develop the infrastructure. It pledged the proceeds from future gaming taxes to pay off the bonds. As a result, 'if the citizens of Deadwood today wanted to get rid of casino gambling, they could not ... without going into total bankruptcy. They are inextricably linked to gambling.'"

Maryland's attorney general cautions, "Once in place, casinos ... exert powerful influence over political, social, and economic life," of the state.

Philadelphia City Council President John Street issued a report which agrees: "The economic gains for new riverboat ventures are almost always overestimated and do not adequately consider the offsetting and difficult to measure social costs."

*The New York Times*, in an August 25, 1996, article, adds, "National trends feeding the bankruptcy courts, experts say, include ... the spread of casino gambling into almost every corner of the country."

We at Common Cause Pennsylvania are naturally concerned that the expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania encourages new sources of large and corrupting political donations.

We believe government should not be funded by the uncertainties of gambling, but on hard work and solid planning.

In the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, Jimmy Stewart's character awakens to find a good town turned into a garish strip of gin joints and gaming halls, only because the good people were no longer there to stand up and say no to big money. It's a waking moment today in Pennsylvania. We are at risk of losing our rich and distinct heritage. Let them have Las Vegas and Atlantic City. We'll keep Pennsylvania, a special commonwealth predicated on decency, tolerance, individual rights and responsibilities, guided by the best of human nature, not shackled by the worst. The world cries out for the true Pennsylvania, a commonwealth dedicated to the betterment of all.