

Comments from the Common Cause Representative  
on Riverboat Gambling  
at Behrend College  
September 12, 1996

Thank you, Chairman Gannon, for allowing me to relate the concerns of Common Cause members and many of the residents of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Erie already has three forms of gambling: Off Track Betting, the Pennsylvania Lottery, and Bingo, which contribute monies to government programs as well as local charities and fire departments. These have satisfied many citizen's urge to have the thrill of wagering. Introducing casino gambling would usurp a much more substantial part of more citizens discretionary income, because it is more addictive. Money wagered on any additional gambling would subtract from savings accounts, charitable giving, and purchases of cloths, autos and homes.

Northwestern Pennsylvania's small population of gamblers would not generate the profits desired by the national corporations because: (1) New York Staters go to Canada or Salamanca for casino gambling, (2) most gamblers below Interstate 80 would go to the Pittsburgh Riverboat, (3) gamblers from Warren, McKean, Potter, Elk, and Cameron Counties would go to Salamanca, (4) the residents of Ohio generally stay in Ohio to gamble as was shown by the bankruptcy of the thoroughbred track, ten miles West of Erie and twenty miles from Ohio.

Slick salesmen from national gambling corporations have already sold a group of gullible investors on the possibility of large profits for themselves and the city/county/state. Money that will come from the discretionary income of people who lack the self-discipline to stay away from addictive pursuits and/or lack the intelligence to understand that the odds are against them.

Attendance at the Riverboat casino will recede when the initial fad wears off and/or when some people begin to realize they are wasting too much time and money. Then, expected profits will not be realized and the corporations will try to get reductions in fees and taxes from the various government entities. When this fails to improve profits significantly they will pull up anchor and sail away to Cleveland or Detroit, leaving Erie much worse off because of their sojourn here.

In conclusion, then, the three methods of gambling which are legal in Pennsylvania are addictive to a small percentage of the residents. But Riverboat (casino) gambling has a much higher level of addiction. It is like comparing cigarette addiction to cocaine addiction. Pennsylvania should never allow another source of addiction to add to its problems. Taxes, when wisely structured and spent are a much better way of financing government.

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