

CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION

July/August/September 2009

VOL. 19 No. 3

Playing the Numbers

by
Jeff Fuller

Numbers are important. They are everywhere: on the speed limit sign, on an orange 911 address card taped to your door, on your driver's license. We have useful numbers in our wallet, in the phone book and on our credit card. Each of these numbers represents something important, vital and life changing. Even the age of a person is a number.

A woman was in a gambling casino for the first time. As she walks the floor, looking at all of the pretty lights, the machines and the special tables she is awestruck. The woman walks up to a roulette wheel and watches as someone plays a round. The attendant invites her to join the game and she says, "I have no idea what number to play." Sitting at the table is a young, good-looking man who suggests she play her age. Smiling at the man, she puts her money on number 32. The dealer spins the big wheel and it flies by once, twice, three times; on the fourth time around the wheel slows and stops on the number 41. As the woman looks at the number and the young man, the smile drifted from the woman's face and she fainted.

Numbers are important and they tell the truth. There are two numbers I am watching right now: HB 676 and SB 471. These are the companion bills before the House of Representatives and the Alabama Senate which call for a statewide constitutional amendment to create an Alabama Gaming Commission, call for the Governor to sign a compact with the Poarch Creek Indians by a certain date and allow electronic bingo machines in fourteen sites across the state. Before you jump on the bandwagon there are a few things you need to know and the first is this is not grandma's kind of bingo (with a card and an ink marker) and the numbers associated with it are important because these tell the truth.

These are some of the numbers you need to know about gambling. Twenty-seven years ago only seven states had lotteries, and only Nevada allowed casinos; now 37 states have lotteries and 28 have casinos which includes Indian gaming. Gambling promises to deliver money for the economy, yet a problem gambler will cost the public \$13,600 per year. Though it is illegal to play the lottery if you are under 18 years of age there are

studies which show that a high share of adolescents are buying tickets in hopes of getting rich quick (32% in Louisiana, 34% in Texas and 35% in Connecticut).

An article I read recently said that for 1-6 million Americans, gambling has become a destructive compulsion. It's like alcoholism - they can't stay away from it. In the end they lose their money, their jobs, their families and their dignity. One compulsive gambler summed up his life this way: "You never really come out ahead. Even when you win, you still lose because you always want to gamble the money into a bigger win - and then you lose it all." It seems a woman named Erika Earnhart won \$1 million through gambling in 1976. Since then she has suffered through two divorces, child custody battles, paying alimony, and tremendous debts.

They tell us this will be good for education. I have heard this statement before. It is the same rationale used to push the legal sale of alcohol. Though in counties across the state where alcohol sales are legal, we still see schools suffering through the complex maze of attempting to maintain quality education for our children. Not far from where I sit writing this article, a school system is attempting to balance the ledger sheets by closing schools and laying off teachers. But alcohol sales are supposed to pay for the education in that county. Give me a break, folks! Allowing things which are detrimental to society will not pay the bills. Gambling is no different. Someone has said, gambling is "predatory, deceptive, addictive and undermines the purpose and promise of America." Amen!

We must not be silent. We must make our voices heard. We do not want, nor do we need bingo gambling or gambling in any form, legal or illegal, in our state. Call your State Representative or Senator today; tell them to vote no on the bills which call for a statewide constitutional amendment to allow gambling in the state of Alabama. And pray for a "slam dunk" once and for all on gambling in our state.

If you want more information on gambling and the bills, call me or a pastor in your area. We want to talk to you about this important issue.

(Fuller is pastor of the Rockford Baptist Church in Rockford, Alabama)

*The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources
The opinions in the Christian Life Report are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission*

Making Illegal Gambling Legal

by
A. Eric Johnston

AN EDUCATIONAL UPDATE FROM THE SOUTHEAST LAW INSTITUTE, INC.

Two bills in the Alabama Legislature, HB 676 and SB 471, seek to make what is now illegal electronic bingo gambling legal in the State of Alabama. The purpose of these bills is to thwart Governor Bob Riley's task force on illegal gambling. At the recent House Tourism and Marketing Committee, Chairman Johnny Mack Morrow said all of the parties with an interest came together in preparation of the bill. It is certainly true that all gambling interests in Alabama came together to propose a constitutional amendment which would monopolize, expand, and immunize electronic bingo gambling in Alabama.

Article IV, § 65, 1901 Constitution of Alabama, does not permit games of chance. Alabama citizens have permitted only 18 constitutional amendments to permit limited charitable bingo by churches, civic groups, fire halls and other charities. In the 1970s, gambling interests tried to expand gambling in Alabama with proposals such as video poker. These were based on electronic machines. The efforts failed, but it opened the door for conversion of these machines to electronic bingo gambling. Under the guise of the 18 amendments, charitable bingo expanded into real gambling. The certain knowledge of this was realized when Houston County in 2008 decided it had authority to open a casino. Following that, Etowah County proposed a casino and bingo gambling began to expand in other counties.

Law enforcement was having a difficult time contending with this and when there were no aggressive efforts to address the problem, Governor Riley set up a task force and charged former Jefferson County DA, David Barber, with the authority to bring a case to the Alabama Supreme Court to determine if this electronic bingo is legal. Prior to this time, we had been working on private efforts to bring such a case. Based on our research and investigation, we are confident of the success of Mr. Barber's mission. Similarly, gambling interests in Alabama are confident of his success. Because of this, they introduced these bills to amend the Alabama Constitution to legalize what they know is illegal.

The bills convert charitable bingo to "for profit private" bingo in the Counties of Etowah, Greene, Houston, Macon, Mobile, Walker and Jefferson. These are venues with significant gambling enterprises in existence. Because the bills exempt these "points of destination," a euphemism for casinos, from all constitutional, state and federal laws and court opinions, there would be no limitation on what kind of electronic gambling could take place.

The bills require any such casino to have a significant infrastructure; for Jefferson County, it would be \$100 million. The bills also permit the casinos to share profits. These provisions are said to stop "predatory competition." Actually, this establishes a monopoly. Legitimate charity bingo will go out of business.

The incentives for these bills is to provide funds for education and Medicaid. Studies show this is a regressive tax. The Legislature has authorized no study and they are not telling the people the truth.

The broad definition of gambling and its exemption from all laws means there will be no law enforcement of any description. Proponents say there will be a "gaming commission" to protect the public. The gaming commission is a seven member political patronage committee who have no substantive or discretionary powers. In other words, they have no authority to regulate. The Department of Revenue only has authority to collect the tax. Our criminal code would have no application to what the gambling monopoly is doing. There will be no regulation or oversight by any other agency.

As if these extreme provisions are not enough, the most deceptive provision of the bills is that the Legislature reserves to itself the right to "supplement" the amendment by later general or local laws. This means the Legislature, by mere statute, will be able to add to, that is, expand gambling further without authority of the people. Keep in mind these bills propose a constitutional amendment. As such, it would be the controlling law in the State of Alabama and we lose all control over gambling.

The proposed ballot language for the amendment will ask the people to vote on establishing bingo in the named counties. This deceives the voter and does not tell the voter that approval of this amendment is to make legal what is now illegal under our criminal laws. The "Sweet Home Alabama" radio ads and mailings are as deceptive as the bills. They say "Illegal gaming machines are sprouting up all across Alabama." The supporters of the bills and ads are engaged in the very same unlawful activity as their scapegoats. They simply want to legalize what all are doing and put the other guys out of business.

If the Legislature truly wants people to vote on whether to legalize gambling, there should be a vote straight up and down on the question of gambling. Not a vote on this monopoly of unregulated, immoral, and illegal activity.

(Johnston is president and general counsel of the Southeast Law Institute, Birmingham, Alabama)



Sweet "Hoax" Alabama

by
Bob Riley



If you've watched TV, listened to the radio or gone to your mailbox lately you've no doubt seen or heard a massive advertising campaign aimed at convincing people to vote for a gambling bill that its supporters call the "Sweet Home Alabama" plan. Those of us who oppose illegal gambling don't have millions to spend on ads, but we do have the facts on our side. When you really look at this plan you realize it should be called "Sweet Hoax Alabama" because that's exactly what it is.

Supporters of this gambling plan claim it will legalize electronic "bingo" and bring a windfall of tax dollars into our state. But here are some things you probably don't know about it. Did you know...

...the plan was hatched by a small group that will make millions of dollars off gambling? During testimony before a Senate committee, one of the plan's supporters said "the group" wrote the bill and gave it to legislators. Who's in "the group"? Well, they refuse to say even though the press and others have been asking. Anytime someone refuses to tell you who's behind a proposal, that's when a red flag should go up.

...the plan gives this unknown casino cartel a complete monopoly? Section four of the bill creates a monopoly for current gambling operators and prohibits any competition. This is their idea of "regulating" gambling: set up a monopoly. They'll get mega-rich because this plan makes it illegal for anyone to compete with them.

...the plan makes slot machines legal in Alabama for the first time in our state's history? Section four of the bill states that "bingo equipment" cannot be considered a slot machine, even if it is a slot machine.

...the plan gives casino operators immunity from Alabama's laws against illegal gambling? It states that not even a Supreme Court judgment can stop them from using these machines. Not only that, section five of the bill specifically allows them to bring slot machines into Alabama from out of state without fear of running afoul of state laws against the transportation, installation, ownership or leasing of slot machines.

... while supporters of the bill praise it as a way to tax gambling, certain favored casino operators would get a special 10 percent tax break under the bill?

...this plan would limit taxes for the others in the

monopoly to 20 percent, which is much, much less than the tax rates other states levy on similar operations? Other states that have such gambling operations have tax rates of 30 to 60 percent. Not only does "the group" give itself a monopoly, it makes sure they pay the lowest taxes in the country!

...supporters of this bill want you to believe you can play a game of bingo in six seconds? Seriously.

...a slot machine is illegal everywhere in Alabama, no matter what it's called? State law defines what a slot machine is and the Supreme Court has made clear machines which "look like, sound like, and attract the same class of customers as conventional slot machines" and that serve essentially the same function as slot machines are illegal in Alabama. This plan would overturn existing law and the Supreme Court's ruling.

...you are twice as likely to become addicted to gambling if you live within 50 miles of a casino? The National Gambling Impact Study Commission reported this fact in its report to Congress. If the "Sweet Hoax Alabama" plan passes, millions of Alabamians would live within 50 miles of a casino. The great hoax being perpetrated by its supporters that this would somehow "limit" gambling is a farce. Almost our entire population would live within the bill's casino zones.

...counties with casinos have higher crime rates than counties without casinos? Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Justice reports more than 30 percent of pathological gamblers committed a robbery within the past year.

Those are the facts and people need to know them. A slick ad campaign doesn't give them to you. So I hope all Alabamians will really look into this so-called "Sweet Home Alabama" plan. Once they do, they'll understand just what is at stake. For "the group" behind it, what's at stake is the chance to become multi-millionaires through a gambling monopoly, a monopoly that will become part of our state constitution. No wonder they're spending so much on their campaign but won't disclose who they are. For Alabamians, what's at stake is the untold billions of dollars taxpayers will lose because of the long-term economic and social costs that always come with casinos.

"Sweet Home Alabama"? Not if they win.

(Riley is governor of Alabama)

GAMBLING HURTS INNOCENT PEOPLE

Gambling harms not only those directly involved in gambling but innocent people as well. Especially vulnerable are members of the gambler's family. Gambling creates financial problems and special tensions in the home. It is difficult to determine whether the gambler or his or her spouse is more physically, mentally, and emotionally damaged by the ravages of a gambling binge. The children of gamblers suffer when a gambling parent loses the money for such necessities as food, rent, clothing, and medicine. They suffer when a gambling parent abandons them in cars, with neighbors, or in gambling daycare centers while they satisfy their gambling addiction. Communities are hurt by the presence of gambling as increasing numbers of people become addicted to gambling and prey on their communities to support their gambling addictions.

Issues and Answers: Gambling - The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Nashville, TN

Don't Risk Your Future with Problem Gambling

by
Paula Tracy

The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that 1 percent of the population are pathological gamblers, and another 2-3 percent problem gamblers. What does that mean? How can we recognize if it is becoming detrimental to us?

Gambling is regarded as a "hidden addiction," meaning that the signs of a problem often go unnoticed until the gambler is in way over his or her head. Fortunately, screening tools exist to help us identify potential problems before it is too late.

Consider the following:

- Have you gambled until your last dollar is gone?
- Have you borrowed money to finance gambling?
- Have you often gambled longer than you had planned?
- Have you lied about your gambling to friends or family?
- Have you used your income or savings to gamble while letting bills go unpaid?
- Have you made repeated attempts to stop gambling?
- Have you broken the law or considered breaking the law to get money to gamble?
- Have you felt depressed or suicidal because of your gambling losses?

- Have you been remorseful after gambling?
- Have you gambled to try to get money to meet your financial obligations?

If you or someone you know can answer "yes" to any of these questions, consider seeking assistance from a professional specifically trained in gambling issues. Gambling has become a problem when it begins to disrupt the stability or quality of one's life. It can cause the gambler to lose a great deal more than just money; health, career, spouse, children and future security can all be forfeited if gambling can't be controlled. Some turn to criminal activity such as fraud, extortion or theft to finance a growing compulsion. Additionally, 76 percent of pathological gamblers have been found to suffer from a major depressive disorder, which greatly increases the risk of suicide, according to the NCPG.

Families of problem gamblers suffer, as well. There's a greater likelihood of child abuse or neglect, marital breakdown, domestic violence, financial problems and substance abuse.

(Tracy is with the 81st Medical Operations Squadron, Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi)



GAMBLING STATISTICS

- ◆ The gambling industry has grown tenfold in the U.S. since 1975
- ◆ 15 million people display some sign of gambling addiction
- ◆ "Players" with household incomes under \$10,000 bet nearly three times as much on lotteries as those with incomes over \$50,000
- ◆ The average debt incurred by a male pathological gambler in the U.S. is between \$55,000 and \$90,000 (it is \$15,000 for female gamblers)
- ◆ The average rate of divorce for problem gamblers is nearly double that of non-gamblers
- ◆ The suicide rate for pathological gamblers is twenty times higher than for non-gamblers (one in five attempts suicide)

www.overcominggambling.com/facts - Dr. Gregory L. Jantz



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