

Expanded Gambling: An Easy Answer to Tough Financial Questions?

Pennsylvania's governor and General Assembly joined together in July 2004 to expand gambling in Pennsylvania with the passage of Act 71, and to authorize the use of gambling proceeds for property tax relief with a companion bill, Act 72. Collectively, these two laws permit the placement of up to 61,000 slot machines at racetracks, resorts, and standalone locations in



Pennsylvania, and would provide property tax rebates to eligible homeowners whose school districts choose to participate.

We might ask, “What is the problem? Those who choose to gamble generate the revenue, while those who don’t gamble don’t have to pay.” *But are the easy choices necessarily the right ones?*

What does the Bible say? In 1 Corinthians 8:9, Paul admonishes us not to use our liberty at the expense of vulnerable persons. That advice is especially appropriate here. Should we use our freedom in activities that impose great costs on others, especially those who are vulnerable in our society (such as those prone to addictive behavior or lacking discretionary financial resources)?

What about the impact of gambling on the poor? Studies show that persons in low-income brackets, including the elderly on fixed incomes, spend much more of their financial resources on gambling than do middle- or upper-income persons. When government raises money from the gambling habits of low-income persons, it violates the idea of progressive taxation, which means that those who are better able to pay should bear a greater portion of public burdens. *The costs of our common projects should not fall unfairly on the poor.*

Is there anything wrong with dreaming about a real chance of financial success that doesn't include hard work and saving? No, but:

- We believe that government is God's instrument for achieving the common good. By promoting gambling, government promotes greed, denigrates work and saving, and places important governmental programs at risk through unreliable funding.
- Government betrays its responsibility for vulnerable people by encouraging persons to gamble and taking away from them what they can little afford to give.

- Gambling is an unreliable source of revenue. When gambling revenues decline—as we have witnessed with the Pennsylvania Lottery—officials then look to more and more exciting games of chance and increased advertising of gambling opportunities. If something is important for the common good, it should be funded in the most reliable and fair way.

Increased revenue from expanded gambling may masquerade as a blessing for the state treasury, but it comes with social costs:

- Incomes from those who gamble are diverted from basic personal, business, and civic services essential to individual and community well being.
- Crime rates rise, adding new costs to local law enforcement.
- Experience in other states belies gambling's promised economic development boom.

Your action is needed. It is very important that members of the General Assembly hear from you. Take a moment to:

1. Write or telephone your senator and representative to ask that they vote to repeal Act 71—that gambling is *not* a favorable way to raise revenues for essential government services.
2. Circulate a petition to repeal Act 71 (available at www.pachurches.org/What/Advocacy/Resources/Resources.htm (click on “Gambling”).
3. Let them know that you support fair, progressive taxation, which benefits the common good and is a more just method of supporting government services.

Go to [www.pachurches.org/What/Advocacy/Resources/Public Officials Links.doc](http://www.pachurches.org/What/Advocacy/Resources/PublicOfficialsLinks.doc) for information on how to contact your Pennsylvania legislators (this link also includes information on finding out who your legislators are if you do not know). Go to www.pachurches.org/What/Advocacy/Resources/Resources.htm and click on “Tips for Contacting Your Legislators and Decisionmakers” for suggestions for doing effective advocacy.

For more information on this issue, or to become more involved in working for the common good of all Pennsylvanians, contact the Advocacy Program of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches pcc@pachurches.org.

**This important information provided by the
Pennsylvania Council of Churches**

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