

Dedicated to the Preservation of the Home

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Dear Friends,

Did you know that Americans gamble more money each year than they spend on groceries? ¹ Or that more than \$600 billion is wagered legally in the United States annually?² Or that nearly one in five homeless people admit that gambling contributed to their poverty, and yet 37 percent said that they continue to gamble?³ Or that five to eight percent of American adolescents are already addicted to gambling?!⁴ Or that 75 percent of pathological gamblers admitted they had committed at least one felony to support their habit?⁵ Or that more money is spent on gambling in the State of Mississippi than on all retail sales combined?⁶ Or that a decade ago, only New Jersey and Nevada permitted casinos, but now 48 states have legalized some form of gambling?⁷ Or that more than 30,000 video poker machines, which are called the "crack cocaine of gambling,"⁸ are scattered through South Carolina, and that the governor who opposed them (David Beasley) was voted out in November?⁹ Or that children as young as four years of age can put money in those poker machines legally in South Carolina as long as they don't accept their earnings?¹⁰ Or that the massive Las Vegas casino called "New York, New York" was completed in 1996 at a cost of \$460 million,¹¹ and more than half of it was paid for in a period of only one year?! ¹²

Clearly, "gambling fever" has engulfed the nation and has penetrated every age group from the very young to the very old. It now threatens the work ethic and the very foundation of the family. Thirty years ago, gambling was widely understood in the culture to be addictive, progressive and dangerous. Parents taught their children about its evils, and some families, including my own, would not even permit playing cards in the home. More recently, however, betting has been given a face lift by the industry -- even changing the name from gambling to "gaming." The effect of this relentless propaganda has been dramatic. Most Americans now think of gambling not as a vice or an unsavory habit but as harmless entertainment.

In inner-city areas, gambling is seen as a "ticket out of poverty" and a last chance for riches. As such, it preys on the desperation of the poor, and its promises are based on lies. When state lotteries are proposed, for example, the public is assured that enormous funds will be generated for education, despite studies showing that after states legalize lotteries they actually reduce spending for education.¹³ The promised "money for schools" has been a scam, just like so much that is associated with the gambling industry.

It was these concerns and the sudden obsession with gambling that attracted the attention of several members of Congress in 1994. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va) led an effort to evaluate the impact of this industry on the economy, on families, and on those who become addicted to it. Largely through his leadership, a bill was finally passed in 1996 that created the National Gambling Impact Study Commission.¹⁴ It was charged with the responsibility of evaluating legalized gambling in all of its forms. The panel was given two years to investigate everything from casinos to lotteries, from dog and horse racing to video poker, from Indian gambling to sports betting, and finally, to Internet gambling, the most unregulated, pervasive and potentially destructive form of all.

Congress specified that nine members be appointed to the Commission, three to be selected by the President, three by the House, and three by the Senate. Kay Coles James (Dean of Regent University School of Government and a member of the Focus on the Family Board of Directors) was designated as Commission Chair. She has done a wonderful job with this controversial and difficult assignment. I was appointed by my great friend, Sen. Dan Coats.* I knew it would be an unpleasant and a time-consuming task, but I felt it was something I needed to do. Our work began in June 1997 and is scheduled to conclude with a final report to be issued on June 18, 1999. Having spent the past 19 months working on this assignment, I've seen more than what I wanted to know about the seamier side of this industry. With the remainder of this letter, I want to share some of the facts that have come to light to this point.

Let's begin by looking at Nevada, which legalized gambling in 1931¹⁵ and remains the glitziest showplace for the industry. More than 40 million visitors come to Las Vegas, Reno, Tahoe and other Nevada cities annually,¹⁶ most with visions of riches dancing in their heads. The majority of them go home broke, or at best, considerably poorer than when they came. Every method is used by casino executives to take their money, from sophisticated behavior modification techniques to skimpily clad young women offering free alcoholic drinks and sweet talk to high rollers. Their seduction is highly effective.

My greater concern, however, is not with families that budget for vacations in a gambling center and go there expecting to

lose a pre-determined amount of money. This is called "destination gambling," and some people are able to participate in it without losing control or becoming hooked. The greater tragedy involves those who turn out to be vulnerable to the highly addictive nature of gambling. No one expects to be one of those victims in the beginning, but the system is designed to snare those who are vulnerable. A substantial portion of casino profits is generated by exploitation of those men and women who have a weakness for gambling.¹⁷

As problem gamblers inevitably slide into the quicksand of debt, they become desperate to "earn it all back." That almost never happens, and even when it does, the addictive individual quickly loses everything again. What follows in those cases is creeping poverty, family disintegration, business failure, fraud, and other serious social ills. Many casino gamblers are older. Up to 40 percent in some centers are over 55 years of age,¹⁸ and it is too late for them to recover the devastating loss of their savings. And believe me, that happens far too frequently. On our tour of the Atlantic City casinos, it appeared that the majority of the patrons were well past retirement age.

The Toronto Sun described a familiar scene this way: "The late night crowd [at Casino Niagara] ... is unmistakably elderly. One woman in her 70s sits at a \$1 slot machine. She has her leg up on the chair of another and her cane thrown over a third. She's playing all three machines as fast as she can. I glance at my watch. It's 3:35 a.m. I decide to wait for her and see if she'll talk with me when she leaves. (Casinos forbid reporters to speak to their patrons anywhere on the property.) Eventually, although I wait 'til 5:30 a.m., she outlasts me."¹⁹

The Cedar Rapids Gazette wrote last year, "The first thing you notice when you walk in [a casino] is that nobody is smiling. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of faces, and not a happy one in the crowd. The people could be automatons, or the not quite perfect replicas of human beings in 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers.' They sit there in front of their machines, going through the motions by rote as though hypnotized, trapped in quiet desperation, vacant expressions on their faces, looking for all the world like the victims of a sweat shop in a union organizing film. These mind-numbed, slack-jawed people sitting at the machines aren't assembly line workers turning out an endless supply of widgets. They are playing slot machines, allegedly having fun, although you'd never guess it by looking at them."²⁰

But what about the glitz and glamour of Nevada? If one scratches beneath the veneer of its gambling-induced prosperity, it becomes apparent that a culture sown on greed and the exploitation of human weakness invariably reaps the social whirlwind. Consider these documented facts: When compared with the other 49 states, Nevada ranks first in the

nation in suicide,²¹ first in divorce,²² first in high school dropouts,²³ first in homicide against women,²⁴ at the top in gambling addictions,²⁵ third in bankruptcies,²⁶ third in abortion,²⁷ fourth in rape,²⁸ fourth in out-of wedlock births,²⁹ fourth in alcohol-related deaths,³⁰ fifth in crime,³¹ and sixth in the number of prisoners locked up.³² It ranks in the top one-third of the nation in child abuse,³³ and dead-last in voter participation.³⁴ One-tenth of all Southern Nevadans are alcoholics.³⁵ And as for the moral climate, the Yellow Pages in Las Vegas lists 136 pages of advertisements for prostitution by its various names.³⁶ No wonder they call it "Sin City." *George* magazine named Las Vegas "One of the 10 Most Corrupt Cities in America."³⁷ Former deputy attorney general Chuck Gardner said, "I don't know if there has ever been a situation with so much power concentrated in one industry. It is government gone berserk."³⁸

This is the legacy of the decision made in 1931 to build Nevada's economy on greed and "get rich quick" schemes. Here's another way to illustrate it: If a particular state were known to have the nation's highest incidence of cancer, AIDS, tuberculosis, heart failure and six or eight other diseases, its health officials would summon a team of epidemiologists to find out why. But the gambling moguls in Nevada, who fully understand the havoc created by their industry, continue to advertise Las Vegas as a wonderland of jobs, tourism, excitement, and "a better life" for residents. They remind me of tobacco executives in the 1980s who raked in obscene profits while denying under oath the addictive and deadly properties of their products. Tobacco manufacturers are now being sued for concealing what they knew, and someday, the same may happen to the purveyors of gambling.

Let me make clear that my purpose here is not to vilify the working people who live in the state of Nevada. I talked with many of the union-based employees of casinos who are members of the Culinary Union when I was in Las Vegas, and found the majority to be hard-working men and women who were simply trying to support their families. Some had escaped from the welfare trap for the first time in their lives, and many had managed to buy a car or a home. They are thankful to receive fair wages and generous benefits. One woman begged me to tell our listeners that she and her co-workers were not "prostitutes or pimps" as some Christians apparently believe; they are ordinary people working hard to survive. I was drawn to these humble men and women and I stated publicly that I would not do anything to disparage them. But the fact remains that the business interest they serve does great harm to others. On balance, gambling produces not prosperity and security but various forms of decay.

It's the same story everywhere. Take a trip sometime to Atlantic City, N.J, which was described to our Commission by Sen. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) as an "extraordinary success story,"³⁹ generated by casinos. I found it difficult not to gag! The unemployment rate in Atlantic City is almost three times the national average (12.7 percent).⁴⁰ While lavish casinos light up the main thoroughfare of the city, the vacant land a block or two on either side resembles a bombed-out war zone. Businesses used to stand on those locations, but they are yesterday's hopes and dreams. More than 200 restaurants have gone broke since the arrival of the casinos.⁴¹ Dry cleaners and specialty shops have disappeared. Even Donald Trump, owner of the Taj Mahal in Atlantic City, has admitted that fact. In a 1994 article, he was quoted as saying, "People will spend a tremendous amount of money in casinos, money that they would normally spend on buying a refrigerator or a new car. Local businesses suffer because they'll lose customer dollars to the casinos."⁴²

As you drive through Atlantic City, you will immediately see what Trump meant. There among the run-down houses, homeless shelters and vacant land, you might hear the echo of Sen. Torricelli's testimony before our Commission. He said with a straight face: "Casinos saved Atlantic City and its people."⁴³

In Biloxi, Tunica, Kansas City, Shreveport, Atlantic City and other gambling centers, pawn shops are inevitably located near the casinos to fleece those who are desperate for cash. They come offering jewelry, watches, spare tires and guns -- anything to get more money with which to gamble. One pawnshop owner in Reno, Nevada, explained how casinos had impacted his business by displaying a jar of gold-filled human teeth which his customers had pulled and pawned.⁴⁴

An article in the *New York Times* stated, "Pawnbrokers here [on the Mississippi Gulf Coast] tell of late night gamblers who, unable to get more cash on their credit cards, buy televisions and radios at 24-hour discount stores, then pawn them for one-third of their value. Others pawn whatever they have because they cannot wait until midnight, when their bank cards will allow them to withdraw more money.... 'I've sat in this window at 4 in the morning and had people willing to pawn their wives,' [said one owner]. 'I've seen some sad stories.'"⁴⁵

No wonder suicide is such a problem in gambling hot spots. One in 25 visitors who die in Las Vegas dies by his or her own hand.⁴⁶ And while the FBI reports that the nation's homicide rate in 1996 recorded the largest one-year drop in 35 years, murders in Las Vegas increased by 36 percent that same year.⁴⁷ Something tragic is going on there and in the other gambling centers of the nation.

In more recent years, Las Vegas and other cities have been advertising themselves as destination vacations for the entire family. Let me tell you about some of the children who tag along with their parents. About 11 percent of Las Vegas' projected 33 million visitors are people under the age of 21, up nearly 50 percent from the early 1990s.⁴⁸ What happens to them while they are there? This is what reporters have observed:

The *Cincinnati Post* reported that in many casinos, clusters of young children -- as young as preschool age -- can be found running in corridors, reclining on stairways or sitting against walls for hours while their parents finish gambling. Late at night, some children are seen visibly struggling to remain awake as their parents play blackjack or slots into the early morning hours.⁴⁹

A maintenance worker at a Las Vegas casino named Andrew Sedano was quoted: "I see kids outside by the pool while their parents are gambling inside.... I see kids as young as 3, 4 and 5 standing outside the doors late at night, waiting for their parents. I just shake my head. They're the parents' responsibility. And the parents are off gambling."⁵⁰

Lisa Faye Kaplan wrote in *USA Today* in 1994: "Grant Spence is all of 9 years old, his face pressed against the glass of a Flip-It casino machine. His blue eyes widen as a line of \$1 coins fall into a slot, adding to a shimmery jackpot. In the past, Grant rode horses in Colorado on vacation. But this summer, the freckled-face youngster says gambling in Las Vegas looks like more fun. 'You can win lots of money,' says the Houston boy as he stands in the MGM Grand Casino and watches his mother feed Flip-It another buck."⁵¹

In another article from *USA Today* about the "family friendly" character of Las Vegas, a security guard at the Four Queens Casino was quoted: "I have had adults ask me, 'Where are the slot machines for juveniles?'"⁵²

Some of the stories are even more tragic. Here's the account of one child who became the topic of newscasts across the nation:

"A 7-year-old girl was raped and strangled in a hotel-casino, apparently by a young man who was captured on a surveillance videotape following her into a women's bathroom. Sherrice Iverson's body was discovered inside a locked corner stall in the bathroom at the Primadonna [Casino] in Primm [Nevada], about 40 miles from Las Vegas....The girl was slain early Sunday after security guards warned her [father] three times that night not to leave her alone in an arcade while [he was] gambling....The surveillance tapes show the girl possibly playing hide-and-seek in the arcade with two men in their

late teens or early 20s. At 3:48 a.m. the girl darted into the women's restroom, and one of the men followed her. The man came out alone 25 minutes later.... After the girl's slaying, her father, Leroy Iverson, 57, of Los Angeles, tried to cut a deal with the hotel, said [a] source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. 'He said he wouldn't sue anybody if they would give him \$100 to gamble with, free beer, fly his girlfriend in from out of town, and he wanted money for the arcade for the girl's 14-year-old brother.'⁵³

"One of the Las Vegas homicide detectives investigating Sherrice's killing said he was amazed by the number of unsupervised children at the Primadonna hotel arcade.... Based on a viewing of surveillance videos of the arcade, the detective said he "counted at least 40 kids in the arcade at 3 in the morning, and I didn't see any adults."⁵⁴

At one moment little Sherrice was laughing and playing in the casino; the next, she had fallen victim to a killer who had seized upon her momentary vulnerability. She was not the only youngster to have lost her life in proximity with a casino. In the last two years, at least two babies have suffocated in hot cars while their parents or babysitters compulsively pumped money into slot machines.⁵⁵ So many children have been left in cars parked in lots at the enormous Foxwoods Casino that the managers (the Mashantucket Pequot Indian tribe) had to post signs warning parents not to leave their kids unattended.⁵⁶ Bad things happen to children when parents are preoccupied, and the lure of riches is the ultimate distraction. Boys and girls have no business being in such places--if for no other reason, because they are being exposed to an activity that could destroy them one day. **IF YOU CHOOSE TO GAMBLE, PLEASE, LEAVE THE KIDS AT HOME UNDER COMPETENT SUPERVISION.**

Well, perhaps this discussion today explains in small measure what I've observed about gambling in the past 19 months, and why I remain radically opposed to it. Simply stated, this activity, euphemistically called "gaming," is a destroyer. It ruins lives and wrecks families. My greatest concern is for the children who suffer most when their parents engage in risky behavior.

Before closing, let me share a final perspective about the epidemic that is sweeping the nation. It reflects the enormous power and influence that is held currently by the gambling kingpins. Because of their unlimited financial resources, which reportedly amount to \$50 billion or more per year,⁵⁷ they can **influence elections** dramatically and entice political leaders to do their bidding. Indeed, the gambling lobby is the most powerful force in government today, and its masters are not reluctant to use it!

Consider the most recent national elections. Ten million dollars was spent in Missouri to gain approval for the controversial casino "boats in moats."⁵⁸ And I've already mentioned the gubernatorial race in South Carolina, in which Gov. David Beasley was defeated by a gambling funded opponent.⁵⁹ The other governor who lost in November, Fob James of Alabama, also faced a \$7 million war chest⁶⁰ controlled, I'm told, by those who wanted a lottery in that state. James opposed it--and lost. *Time* said presidential advisor James Carville has developed a strategy to penetrate the "solid South" for the Democrats. The key is for them to pick off anti-gambling governors one by one. The industry will provide the funds to accomplish it.⁶¹

Rep. Steve Largent, a recent candidate for Majority Leader in the House of Representatives, was vigorously opposed by gambling interests. The *Las Vegas Sun* reported that casino heavyweights helped submarine his candidacy. One gambling leader told the paper, "He's a supporter of the Christian Coalition and would be bad for the gaming industry."⁶²

Indian tribes pulled off the greatest prize. They spent more than \$70 million in advertising during the recent California election, gaining approval from voters to put largely unregulated and untaxed casinos all over the state.⁶³ California will never be the same -- although its citizens appear not to realize it yet.

How about our politicians in Washington? Almost every one of the leaders of both parties has accepted huge campaign contributions. Steve Wynn (Mr. Las Vegas) has sent his plush jet to the Capitol to bring powerful politicians to lucrative fundraisers.⁶⁴ His guests have included Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, each of whom was hustled off to Vegas in 1996 to pick up \$500,000 checks.⁶⁵ Ultimately, they received more than a million dollars each in "soft money."⁶⁶ Dole attended so many Nevada fundraisers that he was nicknamed "Vegas Bob" by one magazine.⁶⁷ Newt Gingrich,⁶⁸ Trent Lott,⁶⁹ Al Gore,⁷⁰ Thomas Daschle,⁷¹ Richard Gephardt,⁷² Tom DeLay,⁷³ Mitch McConnell,⁷⁴ Bill Frist⁷⁵ and many other political leaders have been treated to the same "courtesy." Senator Richard Bryan (D-Nev), who has received \$264,000 in gambling-related PAC and individual contributions since 1991,⁷⁶ has done everything possible to undermine the Commission and interfere with its work. Almost every "big name" in Washington is tainted by gambling money, and their gratitude becomes evident when votes are cast in Congress.

In all, more than 13 million dollars has been contributed to political campaigns in recent years, totaling \$6.1 million to Republicans and \$7.6 million to Democrats.⁷⁷ Obviously, it matters not which party a politician represents as long as he or she plays the tunes dictated by the piper. And, by the way, the

person calling most of the tunes these days, other than Steve Wynn, is Frank Fahrenkopf, former chairman of the Republican National Committee. He is now paid \$800,000 per year⁷⁸ to use his influence on behalf of the gambling industry.

Here are some other recipients of "hard money" from the gambling industry for the period of 1991-96:

Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev)	\$348,459
Rep. John Ensign (R-Nev)	\$214,686
Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.)	\$ 77,150
Rep. James Gibbons (R-Nev)	\$ 75,100
Sen. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.)	\$ 70,600
Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.)	\$ 36,250
Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo)	\$ 24,000
Sen. Fred Thompson (R-Tenn)	\$ 21,500
Sen. Thomas Daschle (D-S.D.)	\$ 18,750
Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL)	\$ 18,500
Sen. John Breaux (D-LA)	\$ 17,500 ⁷⁹

It is not surprising, given this history, that Congress rarely opposes *anything* desired by the gambling industry. It explains why Majority Leader Trent Lott fought the creation of the Commission,⁸⁰ and why he has used his influence to authorize gambling enterprises in his home state of Mississippi.⁸¹ *Washingtonian* magazine said, "Lott has cozied up to Steve Wynn, who not only has provided Lott with use of his private jet but also has given him thousands in campaign contributions [in 1997-98]." ⁸² It tells us why Bill Clinton first favored granting subpoena power for the Commission but then changed his mind shortly after flying off to Vegas for a golf junket with -- guess who? -- Steve Wynn. ⁸³ Consequently, the Commission was denied the authority to require testimony from key witnesses. This is how government works in Washington these days. While the needs of families are ignored, such as the unfair "marriage penalty tax" which was left intact last year after Republicans promised specifically to repeal it,⁸⁴ our representatives continue dancing to the beat of gambling interests across the nation. They should feel our displeasure.

It is my belief that *NO* special interest group should ever be given such power over the electoral and legislative process as occurs today. As long as money sets the agenda, gambling will continue to grow and shape the fabric of American culture.

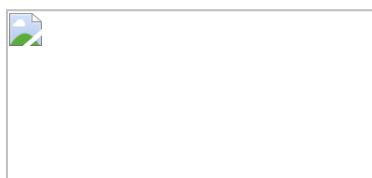
There is so much more I would like to say about this subject, but I'll save it for my next letter. Then I will discuss lotteries and the other forms of gambling that are becoming dominant. I know this is an unpleasant subject, but if my colleagues and I can invest two years of our lives the effort to understand the

scope and implications of this problem, maybe my friends will take a few minutes to review the results. Unfortunately, I doubt if Washington will be among those who will listen. Its power brokers have too much to lose by irritating the industry that helps keep them in office.

Thanks so much for your support during these busy and challenging days. We could not continue without your partnership. Please remember to be in prayer for our Commission as we complete this difficult assignment, and especially, hold up the name of our Chair, Mrs. Kay Coles James. She is attacked by someone nearly every day. I know the feeling!

Happy New Year and God's blessings to you all.

Sincerely in Christ,



James C. Dobson, Ph.D.
President

"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1Tim. 6:9, KJV)

* Although it is probably not necessary to do so, I feel obliged to make it clear that I am writing to you in my capacity as President of Focus on the Family -- not as a member of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. The views expressed in this letter are mine and those of Focus on the Family.

Endnotes:

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⁵ Arnold Wexler, "Statistical Information on Compulsive Gamblers," Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc, pg. 2.

⁶ Joe Rutherford, "Resist Expansion of Casino Gambling," *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*, September 30, 1995, p. 6A.

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⁹ Edward Walsh, "Gambling's Election Win," *The Washington Post*, November

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¹⁸ Illinois Gaming Board, "Patron Survey," April 1998, p. 2.

¹⁹ Jean Sonmor, "High Rollers...and Big Losers," *Toronto Sun*, May 11, 1997, p. 12.

²⁰ Mike Dupree, "Are Slots Too Big a Gamble?," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, March 9, 1998.

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²² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁴ Sue Glick, "Numbers of Females Murdered by Males in Single Victim/Single Offender Homicides and Rates by States, 1996, Ranked by Rate," Violence Policy Center, Washington D.C., September 1998.

²⁵ Rob Bhatt, "Assigning Responsibility for Responsible Gambling," *Las Vegas Business Press*, June 22, 1998, p.8; "Gaming Industry 'Amazed' Over Neighborhood Slots Debate," *Las Vegas Sun*, February 20, 1998; Rex Buntain, "There's a Problem in the House," *International Gaming and Wagering Business*, July 1996, p. 40; Paul Pringle, "Dealing with Addiction: Las Vegas' Gaming Industry a Backdrop for High Rate of Compulsive Gamblers," *Dallas Morning News*, May 30, 1997, p. 1A.

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²⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

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