

Ladies and Gentlemen of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission:

I am pleased to welcome you to Las Vegas. If you had a chance to study my biographical background, you will note that I have spent most of my life in Las Vegas. My father, William J. Kenny, now deceased, worked for nearly 30 years in the gaming industry, most of that time as a Keno writer and boss at the Horseshoe Hotel and Casino in downtown Las Vegas. During my summers, back home from my seminary studies, I also worked at the Horseshoe Hotel and Casino -- first, before I was 21 years old, in what is called the "count room" -- where revenue is counted. I counted money for the non-gaming revenues: restaurants, bar and hotel. When I turned 21, I was an accountant for Keno money revenues and eventually worked in the "Casino Cage" as a cashier. Growing up in Las Vegas, attending grade school and high school here, many of my classmates were also from families who owned or worked in gambling properties. Since my ordination to the Catholic priesthood, 27 years ago, I have been assigned in the Las Vegas area. Therefore, I believe that I am uniquely qualified to speak to you, the members of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, about the impact of gambling upon myself, my friends and relatives, and the thousands of families to whom I have and am ministering as a priest.

Yes, I have heard all the jokes -- especially in the seminaries in California, Washington, D.C. and Europe -- about living in "Sin City", "Lost Wages", etc. I always answer that I grew up in this city and 'turned out' pretty good -- as an ordained Catholic priest. For once you leave the gambling 'corridors' of Casino Center and the Las Vegas Strip, Las Vegas is just like any other city in the southwestern United States. Drive along any of our neighborhood streets and you could as well be in Phoenix, Albuquerque or Palm Springs. So many times, I have been asked the rather ridiculous question: "Well, where do you people live in Las Vegas?" I wonder what answer they expect: "...in the hotels, in trailers behind the casinos, underground." We live, like everybody else, in houses, condos, apartments, townhouses, trailers, etc. We live on real streets; and, in our neighborhoods, we have schools, parks, baseball/softball, soccer and football fields, basketball courts, gymnasiums, YM & YWCAs, 7-11s, supermarkets, shopping centers, malls, movie theaters, ice and roller skating rinks, water parks, bicycle and jogging paths. We have churches -- more per capita than many cities in the USA --; when outside of Las Vegas, many Catholics tell me that they have been to THE Catholic Church in Las Vegas. I politely correct them that they were probably at the Cathedral or the Shrine, two Catholic Churches on the Strip serving the tourist population, but, in fact, there are more than 20 other Catholic parishes in the Las Vegas area -- serving thousands of Catholic parishioners! My parish of Christ the King Catholic Community has over 3000 families registered, and we're not the largest: two or three others have 4000 to 5000 registered households. Our children belong to cub, brownie, boy and girl scout troops (with parents/adults as their leaders); they play in soccer leagues, Pop Warner Football, Little League, etc. It is as unfair to judge all of Las Vegas by the image of Casino Center and the Las Vegas Strip as it is to judge all those who live in New Orleans by the French Quarter or Bourbon Street, or those who live in New York City by Manhattan or Times Square, or all San Franciscans by Fisherman's Wharf or the Tenderloin district. Once you leave the parts of town that attract the tourist population, the rest of the city is as normal as apple pie and the fourth of July.

What impact does the casino industry have on the community? As far as negative impact, I see very little that differentiates it from other parts of the country. Though I have served as a priest only in Las Vegas, I have classmates from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. from practically each of the other 49 states; when we get together and compare notes, we all face the same problems: dysfunctional families, the problems of both parents working, 'latch-key' kids, divorce, the impact of sex and violence in the media (especially on

TV), peer pressure, the enormous pressure of competition at school and in athletics, the attraction to money, the lack of many real heroes, the disappointment in government, etc. These problems in Las Vegas, with a population of over 1 million, are also faced by people living in New York City, Baltimore, Miami, Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, San Diego, Phoenix and Seattle.

I do see many positive benefits offered by the casino industry. Because the casinos in Las Vegas are open 24 hours, there are many more jobs to fill than might be available in other industries that have business hours of only 9 to 5 or even early morning to late night. Every casino and hotel has need for three shifts (day, swing and graveyard) in many of its departments -- casino, restaurants, hotel, shops, etc. Because there are three shifts each day in so many of these casino/hotel departments, many couples are able to split their individual shifts between them, resulting in one parent always being at home with the children. This has a financial advantage in not having to pay for day care for the children. Of course, it does put a strain on the couple themselves and their own time together as a couple and as a family, but most find a satisfactory way to accomplish this -- capitalizing on their quality time together and joint days off.

Most casinos pay competitive wages with minor differences. The hotels on the Strip usually pay a little more than do the ones downtown in Casino Center or than the neighborhood casinos. Normally, casinos that have union workers in the hotel and restaurants have higher salaries and better benefits and health packages; however, some casinos that are non-union in these departments do offer quite attractive and competitive salaries and benefits. I know that the salaries offered here in combination with the cost of housing and of living, in general, are very good for the employees. I don't know of any additional costs other than the differences in some benefit packages: some companies pay for the entire health and pension plan, while others have a shared payment plan with the employee. I am constantly being told by new parishioners, many of whom have moved here from other parts of the country, that they are living better than ever before and finally have been able to afford to put money down for a house -- something that they might not have been able to do as soon or at all in other states.

There seems to be a real pride in casino workers that they work for this particular casino; there are plenty of advancement opportunities in all areas. I can tell story after story of persons who started out as maids, porters, food servers, slot machine change persons, dealers at dice and blackjack, hotel registration clerks and now are heads of their shift, department managers, pit bosses, etc. Most casinos prefer to 'advance' within their own ranks -- banking on these persons' experience and loyalty. Yes, when a new casino opens, many people do apply for employment there -- because they now have the experience that a new casino needs; naturally, this leaves vacancies in the casinos they have left -- vacancies that are always filled quickly and adequately.

This is a wonderful town for minority employment for many reasons. All casinos operate under a non-discrimination policy. There are so many jobs available that those sheer numbers of opportunities make it possible for anyone to apply and be hired. If a person lacks the skills, there are easily accessible training: dealers' schools for the casino games, 'on the job'-training for many of the hotel and restaurant positions, union-sponsored training and placement. I believe that we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. I am convinced that almost anyone could get a job in Las Vegas if that person truly wants to work. I know of no discrimination in casinos against people because of their race, religion, color, ethnic background, age or sex. I would think that the percentage of minorities in casino employment is similar to the percentage of the population as a whole. Many persons must enter the casino work at a low entry level position -- because of their limited skills or knowledge of gaming itself; I do not believe that this is tied to one's being part of a minority group, but simply lack of certain skills at the time of hire. However, as stated before, extensive training is available and advancement is certainly possible.

I don't think that there are major differences between management and labor's point of view concerning the overall need to serve the customer: the tourist, the convention attendee, the gambler, the shopper, the diner, etc. Everyone knows that the 'customer comes first' and that Las Vegas' future depends on the satisfaction of the customer and his/her return to Las Vegas. Management, of course, also wants a satisfied working force and, as I stated earlier, I hear of great satisfaction and pride from many different casino employees that they are happy to work at such-and-such casino and are loyal to that casino. The Las Vegas industries of hotel and gambling have their normal differences of opinion between labor and management -- especially at the time of contract negotiations. I belong to the Las Vegas Interfaith Council for Worker Justice, similar to other such organizations in other cities, to work with management and employees to arrive at better and more just wage levels, benefits and working conditions. Our work has been productive in many areas, but I don't believe our problems are unique to the gaming industry, but just part of the normal tensions that exist in most places between management and labor.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that Las Vegas is a great place in which to have grown up and an even greater place today. I say 'greater today' because there are just more opportunities today in Las Vegas for family and youth activities than when I was growing up here; that is only natural when you consider that Las Vegas was just a town of 25,000 people in the 1950's and now it is a big city of more than one and a quarter million persons. With that tremendous growth comes more recreational, educational, spiritual and social opportunities. In addition, city and country government is working more and more on providing services and activities for the 'locals', whereas in the past, all the attention was given to the tourists. As a priest, I minister as most priests do all over the country to the needs of families, couples, singles, children, teens, young adults, senior citizens, etc. I do not find that I am forced to provide any special type of counseling to our parishioners here due to the gambling industry. In fact, growing up here and watching so many young people grow up today in Las Vegas, I know that the attraction to gambling is minimal, at best. Perhaps because we have grown up with gambling in our 'back yard' so to speak, it is not a special attraction to us. It just part of our town's industry. I don't experience our young people craving to gamble or getting fake IDs to sneak into casinos. And we all know that new casinos are built and old ones remodeled because of the money spent there; we're pretty well aware of the odds. Most local people who do gamble, do so as a source of recreation, just as in other cities they would play Friday night poker, Wednesday night Church bingo, a Saturday at the race track or a Sunday afternoon bridge game. I do very few counseling sessions for the gambling addict; and yet, more and more casinos are providing 'in-house' counseling or paying for the counseling of their own employees who might have a gambling problem.

Nevada and Las Vegas are the national pioneers in casino gambling. Over the years, we have worked out an atmosphere for the tourist and the local. We have a very strong and effective Gaming Commission which works on all the licensing and regulating necessary. We should be the model for all other areas in the country that have or might consider having gambling. We have worked out many of the problems and are adequately prepared to continue to handle and solve any future problems. I would recommend Las Vegas as an ideal place to live for many reasons: great weather, a reasonable cost of living, great employment opportunities, including the possibility of easy advancement, a strong and every-growing school system, wonderful opportunities for recreation. Yes, Las Vegas WITH ITS GAMBLING INDUSTRY is a wonderful family town! Again, I grew up here and I turned out 'pretty good'.