

1 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Ms. Bray.

2 MS. BRAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me
3 permission to address the National Gambling Impact Study
4 Commission.

5 Because of my gambling addiction of 28 years, I have
6 no material wealth, no savings account, my credit is shot, I have
7 no husband or children, I've lost the trust of my family and
8 friends, and I had my pets of almost ten years euthanized, I'm
9 responsible for three of my roommates having their cars
10 repossessed because they gave me the car note money in the hopes
11 I'd hit it big and they would get half of my winnings.

12 I found myself being abusive to the same people who
13 were giving me the money. If I lost or had to wait for a
14 gambling stake, I wasn't a nice person to be around. I had an
15 emotional and mental breakdown, and have to be on medication for
16 the rest of my life. There are nights that I can't sleep because
17 of flashbacks with gambling; I can't watch movies that have
18 gambling in them because it triggers a euphoria.

19 When the 9:59 p.m. news comes on, I find myself
20 switching the channel so I don't hear that man say, "And you
21 could be our lucky millionaire tonight." When possible, I avoid
22 service stations that offer gambling and alcohol.

23 There were times I'd play video gambling machines way
24 into the next day; it was always so dark I never knew if it was
25 day or night, and frankly, I didn't care. It was nothing to play
26 video machines 20 to 30 hours in a single outing. I played cards
27 one time for three days. I considered myself a bad gambler

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1 although the video places and bookies thought of me as a
2 goldmine.

3 I couldn't settle on betting one horse race or one
4 team or just play a \$20 bill at the video machine, once I
5 started, it was no stopping. That's all it takes for a gambler
6 to get their fix; action was my drug of choice. In order to keep
7 that action or high going, I had to keep playing and taking
8 chances until there was no money left, and only then would I come
9 down from high.

10 I got a feeling of relief and glad it was finally
11 over when I lost \$2- or \$300 of my own money plus the credits I
12 had won on the machine, as I thought of, as I got up from the
13 seat, is where I'm going to get another gambling stake.

14 There are so many people I've wronged that it would
15 probably take me a lifetime to forgive myself, even though I've
16 asked God's forgiveness and made amends to just about everyone I
17 know. Up until five years ago, I never thought I would have
18 become the liar and con artist that I was for those 28 years.

19 As a child I was asked what I wanted to be when I
20 grew up, and I said with confidence: A school teacher or a
21 nurse. What a difference pitching pennies, playing marbles and
22 watching quarter horse racing and stealing beer from my uncle's
23 truck all before the fifth grade makes.

24 Pastors and Christians talk with me about casinos and
25 video gambling games destroying families. If I would have heard
26 my minister speak against gambling when I was a child, or even if
27 I had heard it spoken when I became an adult, I might feel like I
28 had been given a warning.

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1 The churches are hurt more than they realize when
2 gamblers get into the kind of trouble they can get into. I have
3 come to understand that ministers perceive gambling as a
4 political issue instead of a religious or moral issue. I have
5 trouble understanding how they can make that distinction. Our
6 children need to learn that gambling is a vice, they need to know
7 how destructive any "get something for nothing" attitude or
8 belief system can be.

9 In closing, I'm grateful -- and I was having a hard
10 time with this here -- that approximately five years ago that I
11 chose, when I had my pets euthanized, that I chose not to kill
12 myself with a .38 to the heart. After I covered their mass
13 grave, I went inside my house and dropped to my knees and said,
14 "God, please forgive me; I give up, tell me what you want me to
15 do." From that point on, God began to work this miracle.

16 At 46, I'm content with my simple life. I have pets
17 again, I have abstained from gambling for two years, five months
18 and five days, and I've been free of alcohol for three years,
19 eight months and seven days.

20 I'm the founder and president of Gamblers Second
21 Chance Club, a non-profit organization, for almost 2-1/2 years,
22 chairing 32 meetings in four cities. I also provide a toll free
23 number, Gambling Helpline of Louisiana, for any recovering
24 gamblers or persons who need to talk about the problem. No one
25 in our non-profit organization gets a salary.

26 In closing, if I may just add my own words. The
27 people from where I came from, Many, Louisiana, believed in me
28 and knew what type of person I was before, and they have, through

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1 their generous donations, helped me to continue traveling all the
2 cities for this 2-1/2 years.

3 But I wanted to say, in short, that money didn't mean
4 anything to me because I had left Many one time with \$8,000 cash,
5 went to the Isle of Capri in Bossier City, sat at the Black Jack
6 table at 5:00 p.m., bought in with \$2,000. This is on record and
7 I have witnesses that can testify to this. From five o'clock to
8 eleven o'clock, I had \$7,000 profit; at one o'clock I had
9 \$14,000-plus profit with still my \$5,000 unwrapped.

10 They kept changing dealers for me. The people that I
11 had known from Many that were there told me to leave twice. I
12 said, No, I'm on a roll. From one o'clock
13 to three o'clock, a female dealer cleaned me out of \$20,000, as
14 my Lord is my witness, and that was in two hours. When I got up
15 from the table, I didn't feel bad, I just was kind of like
16 wanting to kick myself for losing, but I thought, well, it's just
17 a savings account, they'll give it back to me. Two weeks later I
18 came and lost again, and that's when I said, That's it.

19 I didn't even have a car then. The drive to gamble,
20 it's unreal, I cannot tell you the money that I have lost and the
21 things that I made people do: you know, taking a girl to Vegas
22 and having her pawn and eventually sell her truck to give me the
23 money.

24 So these things, Mr. Chairman, I'm telling you I'm so
25 grateful that I chose not to kill myself because of gambling.
26 Whenever you start hallucinating, seeing things, hearing things,
27 and you get to that point where you have your emotional and

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1 mental breakdown because of that, that's when I had a decision to
2 make: either kill myself or get help, and I chose to get help.

3 I want to thank you again for letting me have this
4 opportunity to address the Commission.

5 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Thank you very much for coming
6 here and for your testimony.

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