

NATIVE AMERICAN GAMBLING IV

Social Impact Panel

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF TOM TUCKER, PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA
COUNCIL
ON PROBLEM GAMBLING, INC., PALM SPRINGS

THRESHOLD REMARKS

I take no position for or against gambling per se, however, I'm most concerned about the effects of problem and compulsive gambling on all citizens. The following testimony is based on actual personal experiences, results of "Problem Gambling Help Line" calls, input from various Indian Tribal Councils, experts in compulsive gambling and results of questions posed to other interested parties in the Judicial, Probation and Child Protective agencies. That said, virtually nothing short of longitudinal studies and other empirical research will provide the exact information this commission seeks.

To what extent has Native American gambling increased the problem of compulsive gambling on the reservation?

I've personally observed problem gambling when living as a privileged guest on a reservation which had a casino. However, I've heard from some Tribal leaders who flatly state "we have no compulsive gamblers on the reservation" and other experts who report an increase in problems from gambling on the reservation. Perhaps, the answer lies somewhere in between. Many experts identify upwards of 40-50% of all Alcoholics also suffer with gambling problems. If you believe there are problems with Alcoholism on the reservation (including recovering Alcoholics), it's no big stretch to see compulsive gambling there as well.

Off the reservation?

There has been a marked increase in "help line" calls from Native American gambling in the past few years. The number of 12 step recovery meetings has increased **"eight-fold"** in the past two years in a California community that has the most dense concentration of Indian casinos in that state. Additionally, local Therapists report an increase in both individual and group therapy related to patients experiencing problems from gambling at the Indian casinos.

Has there been a measurable increase in crime on and off the reservation due to Indian casinos? Family Abuse? Drug and Alcohol abuse?

My threshold remarks indicate that a uniformed criminal justice reporting procedure relating to problem and compulsive gambling would be the ideal. What crimes are gambling related? a recent survey indicated that a prison population of Alcohol and Drug Addicts reported that 30% of all their crimes were to property to fence or obtain money with which to pay off bookies and to have money to gamble otherwise. Previously, this group would've been thought of as committing crimes to obtain money to "buy drugs". What about Forgery? Bad Checks? Embezzlement or other "white collar" crimes such as insurance frauds? How about tax evasion?

Locally, last Monday, July 20, 1998, 20% of the attendees had "court cards" to be signed to indicate to their sentencing Judge that they were getting help for their gambling related problems associated with gambling at Indian casinos. Additionally, the Probation department advises that their caseloads involving criminal activities surrounding gambling at local Indian casinos has risen in the past year. Also, there have been instances of Mothers who have left their children at home alone and where arrested coming out of the Indian casino. One case involved a woman who left her 9 year old daughter in the car at the Indian casino parking lot for 14 hours while she gambled compulsively.

Family abuse both on and off the reservation minimally involves problems of **neglect**. For every hour a problem gambler remains in the Indian casino at either a video slot machine, card table or bingo parlor, that's one more hour (usually of many hours) that a child or spouse are deprived of family relationships.

Drug and Alcohol abuse walk hand and hand with compulsive gambling. As noted earlier, there's a high comorbidity risk with compulsive gamblers. **Free Drinks!** are also an enticement to gamblers in many casinos, which falls right into the alcohol-gambling equation. One man advanced the input that he worked closely with the Tribal Police of an 11,000 member Arizona Tribe and said "the domestic assault and alcohol

abuse rate on [that] reservation was one of the highest in the country", however, has not necessarily increased since gaming arrived on the reservation. Combine the "obsession" and "compulsion" to gamble with "alcohol or drug affected thinking" and you're left with a powerful combination.

How has gambling affected traditional Indian cultures on the reservation?

Probably in a positive manner. I've personally observed an increase in the number of Pow Wows. The financial benefits have allowed these Tribes to have more "Drums", larger number and more elaborate costumes for the increased number of "competition dances" and finally the size of the Tribal "give-aways" has increased. An Indian Tribal leader advised me that one Tribe was now able to afford their long awaited Cultural Center.

Are there any adverse social impacts on the reservation from Indian casinos? Off the reservation?

A March 28, 1998 San Francisco Examiner article quoting Tim Giago, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Indian Country Today, a national weekly newspaper, to state "These days, I am hearing tales of Indian men and women reacting..... One man, an employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and his wife, who works for the Tribal government, middle-class Americans for all intent and purpose, find themselves over their head in debt because of the frequent trips to their Tribe's casino. They have reached the point where they are beginning to sell off some of their possessions in order to get back into the game".

Off the reservation is very replete with examples of adverse social impacts from Indian Casinos such as Bankruptcies raising the cost of goods and services for all citizens. Family break-ups raising the costs of social service financial supports to the family. Loss of employment results in reduced family income and a reduction in total productivity for our nations. Criminal justice costs go up with the process of investigations, prosecutions and incarcerations. How about the costs related to attempted suicides? Paramedics called out, life-saving medical expenses, inpatient minimum 72 hour holds under section 5150 H&S Code for psychiatric evaluation, etc.

It's been reported from research by Henry Lesieur that between 10 and 17 people are adversely affected by their relationship with a compulsive gambler. (Family, Friends, Employers, Neighbors, etc.)

Why have some Tribes decided against permitting commercial gambling on

their reservation?

One Tribal leader told me there were two primary reasons. "The most prevalent reason deals with the fact that many of their reservations are so remote that it would be economically unfeasible to invest the vast amounts necessary to construct a facility. They are unable to compete with Tribal facilities more suitably located and absorbing the market. The other reason is simply that some Tribes have voted among their membership and have declined to have gaming based on **strong traditonal cultural beliefs** [emphasis added] that such activity is **contrary to their cultural social framework**". [emphasis added].

However, it should also be noted that there are currently 42 active Indian Casinos in California with an additional 42 proposed out of the approximately 100 Tribal Councils.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Tucker