

1 **MS. TONI JOHNSON**

2
3 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Toni Johnson.

4 MS. JOHNSON: Hi. My name is Toni Johnson and I'm an
5 employee of the Empress casino in Joliet. I would like to thank
6 you for allowing me to address the Commission this afternoon.

7 I would like to tell you my story about what the
8 riverboats have done, not only for me, but also for people in the
9 same type of situation as myself. First of all, I was fortunate
10 to have a job when the riverboats came to town. I was working as
11 a janitor for a grade school. Good job, yes; career, no. I had
12 no chance for advancement and no chance for additional growth.

13 I started at the Empress as a dealer. After I came to
14 work for the riverboats, I realized that this was my chance to
15 get into a business where a small town person like myself would
16 actually have the opportunity to have a great career. After
17 about a year and a half I was promoted to a game supervisor to
18 watch over the table games. For the first time in my life I was
19 in a job where I could actually get promoted.

20 Then the Empress came up with the management training
21 program to develop the management skills of diverse individuals.
22 I applied for the program and was elated when I was selected.
23 This program took ordinary people like myself and sent us through
24 several departments so that we could learn every aspect of the
25 casino industry. They also sent us to several classes and
26 seminars for additional training. I have never been given the
27 opportunity in any of my past jobs to be sent to further my
28 education.

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1 After completion of the program I was reassigned to
2 the table games department where I currently hold the title of
3 table games manager. I cannot think of any other company where I
4 would have had the opportunity for such a great career. I'm
5 proud to say that I work for a riverboat called the Empress and I
6 thank God every day for giving me the insight and guiding me into
7 making the right career choice for myself and for my family.

8 Secondly, I would like to make you realize what a
9 positive impact the riverboat casinos have had on our community.
10 First, I'd like to take you back to pre-June of '92 when the
11 first riverboat came to the town of Joliet. Unemployment was
12 high and it was in my perception that it was very unsafe to walk
13 around in the downtown area. Now the downtown area is cleaned up
14 and beautified, local businesses and merchants have benefited
15 from the increased flow of people who flock to a once depressed
16 city to visit our riverboats. The merchants who have benefited
17 in some ways include restaurant owners, hotels, bakeries, office
18 supply, food suppliers, vending merchants, local grocery, uniform
19 suppliers, dry cleaners, rental agencies, day care centers,
20 construction companies, local painters, electricians and the list
21 goes on and on. Do I make my point?

22 On Thursday May 14th, the Joliet Herald News reported
23 what the impact was of jobs created by Illinois riverboats. In
24 1991, 1,820 jobs were created. In 1995, 17,300 people were
25 employed by Illinois riverboats. Yes, the riverboats have made a
26 great economic splash and the records prove that. I close my
27 comments with a quote from the Chicago Tribune dated May 15th,
28 1998 and I quote, "Casino gambling in Illinois contributes almost

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1 \$1.4 billion a year to the state economy or about three Monet
2 exhibits or nine Democratic national conventions." Thank you.

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