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MIKE HARRIS

MR. HARRIS: Thank you. Madam Chairperson, members of the Commission, I am Mike Harris. I'm the Executive Director of Michigan Family Forum located in Lansing, Michigan. I first encountered the issue of riverboat casinos in 1993 while I was a Kansas State Senator. The argument then was Missouri has riverboats that are taking all our money and we must respond. The right response, the lobbyists said, was to put a casino and a race track on the Kansas side of the river.

Using that same argument, the casino industry is having some success in Michigan. The Windsor Casino across the river from Detroit, just like a large riverboat casino, is supposedly sucking all the money out of Michigan, never to return again. So the argument is we've got to have our own casinos to keep our money home and to create all those high paying jobs that the casino industry touts.

Defeated several times in 1996, the gambling interest staged a massive last minute expenditure and narrowly obtained approval of a ballot initiative to authorize three casinos in downtown Detroit. There is a movement underway to appeal that initiative, but failing that, it appears that casinos will be located on the river, though not in boats, at least avoiding the hippocracy that exists in some locations, such as the boats in moats in Kansas City. What can we expect from these Detroit casinos? Experience with Native American casinos and the nearby Windsor Casino gives us some indication, and the independent studies which have been done are helpful as well.

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1 Number one, bankruptcies will grow. According to
2 articles published in the Detroit newspapers, bankruptcy
3 attorneys in the Detroit area are already experiencing a
4 tremendous growth in bankruptcy filing as a result of the Windsor
5 Casino gambling. One estimated that the increase in his cases
6 was 40-fold.

7 Two, addiction will likely multiply and indeed
8 already has. Michigan had nine chapters of Gamblers Anonymous
9 five years ago and now has 35. And the survey by Western
10 Michigan University, completed in 1997, shows that there are
11 230,000 Michigan adults who have experienced gambling problems in
12 the past year, nearly 90,000 of them meeting the criteria of
13 pathological gamblers. Wayne County, which is Detroit, has the
14 highest rate of gambling problems in the state. These problem
15 gamblers in that study lose on average more than \$6,000 a year on
16 gambling, and most never seek help. Only two and a half percent
17 of the problem gamblers and six percent of the pathological
18 gamblers reported ever seeking help for the problem.

19 Number three, crime will increase. Crime is
20 decreasing nationally. Certain crimes in casino neighborhoods
21 are increasing. In the Detroit area recently a man faked his own
22 son's kidnapping in order to try to pay back \$50,000 in gambling
23 debts. According to a recent survey of the Detroit area by
24 Social Systems Research Institute, not commissioned by the
25 gambling industry, arson and car theft, two crimes which can be
26 staged to raise money to pay for gambling addiction have risen in
27 the Detroit area 118 percent and 18 percent respectively, since
28 the Windsor Casino came in.

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1 Number four, the poor will be victimized. The same
2 survey by SSRI finds that the percentage of compulsive gamblers
3 in Detroit is twice as large as the rest of the state. Nearly
4 three in ten of those receiving public assistance reported
5 patronizing a casino in the last year and those on public
6 assistance lost five times more as a proportion of their total
7 household income than did other Detroiters. Thirty-eight percent
8 of single Detroit mothers patronized casinos within the last
9 year. And African-Americans lost two and a half times more at the
10 casinos than did whites. New locations will surely multiply
11 these problems.

12 For Michigan families, especially those in Detroit,
13 the expansion of casino gambling won't mean a brighter future,
14 rather it will be the doorway to addiction, bankruptcy and
15 darkness for a city that deserves better. Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you.

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