CHAIRMAN JAMES: Mr. Middleton.

MR. MIDDLETON: Thank you, Madame Chairman.

At the outset, I should like to make a dedication of this testimony and say that it is prepared expressly for and dedicated especially to those many thousands of persons in Louisiana whose lives either have been or will be adversely affected by gambling problems. Their names may be Antoine or Arceneaux, Washington or Wilson; they may live in Lake Providence or Cocodrie, in one of our major metropolitan areas or, for that matter, Angola. They are people, my people, they're Louisianans, 200,000 to 300,000 strong. It is for them that this testimony is prepared and presented.

Madame Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the Commission, good morning. I'm at once honored and humbled to be invited to testify before this august body -- even though it is the middle of September -- and to be a part of this truly distinguished panel. I salute you and commend you for your dedication and I join you in your commitment to help the problem gambler and his or her family.

I want to welcome the Commission and my fellow panelists to the country that is Louisiana. We are just a little bit different -- you seem to have found that out last night, Madame Chairman -- and we truly hope you'll stay for a bit and find that out for yourselves. I couldn't help but notice that the Commission planned its hearing so as to end the week in New Orleans. A coincidence? I don't think so.

I congratulate you, rather, on your foresight.
I also noticed that the agenda stated that Saturday is reserved for individual meetings, and I simply wanted to say that if you meet with someone who thinks that the former secretary general of the United Nations is named Boudreaux Boudreaux Guillory, he might be a little bit Cajun; or if his favorite TV personalities are Okra Winfrey and Bryant Gumbo, he might be just a little bit Cajun; or if he thinks the four seasons are bell pepper, garlic, celery and onion, he is probably a little bit Cajun.

But in any event, we hope that you all can pass a good time here and we just ask you to laissez le bonton roulet. We're glad to have you.

I'm Reece Middleton, executive director of the Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling, the Louisiana affiliate of the National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc., and as an affiliate council of National, we are neither pro legalized gambling nor anti legalized gambling; our position is one of proactive neutrality.

Our mission statement calls for us to advocate for all individuals in Louisiana who may be affected by gambling problems and to promote quality assistance for those persons who are ever indicated.

On the national level I'm privileged to serve on the board of directors for the National Council on Problem Gambling. I've been working with addictions treatment and addictions management since 1980; I'm personally in recovery from another addiction since 1976; received my first call about compulsive gambling and gambling addiction, interestingly enough, in 1982...
which is a significant date indeed, and I'll say more about that later.

I'd like to discuss, first of all, the problem by saying that in the 1995 regular session of the Louisiana Legislature, Senator Jay Dardenne introduced Senate Resolution Number 149 which formed the Louisiana Compulsive Gambling Study Committee, and among other things, its charge was to study the problem of compulsive gambling in Louisiana. Such a study was done by Dr. Rachel Volberg of Gemini Research, the preeminent researcher in the field in 1995.

That study showed that approximately 1.4 percent of those persons in Louisiana over the age of 21 have a gambling problem severe enough to be termed pathological gamblers -- that is to say they would probably be diagnosed as pathological gamblers and meet the diagnostic criteria set down in DSM-IV(312.31) known as Pathological Gambling which is a disorder of impulse control.

The study further showed that for persons 18 to 21 the percentage of pathological gamblers was a rather disturbing 3.1 percent which is over twice as much as the over-21 population. Also indicated as having some level of problem with gambling but not severe enough to qualify as pathological, there was an additional 3 percent of those persons over age 21, and again at a disturbing level, almost four times as many, 11.2 percent of those persons 18 to 21.

The totals, then, reflect 4.4 percent of over 21 adults and 14.3 percent of 18 to 21 adults with some level of gambling problem at the present time. As a percentage of the
total population, this calculates to slightly under 5 percent, and the study further showed that at some point during their lifetime, approximately 7 percent of our population would have some level of problem.

A study of 12,066 adolescents in grades 6 through 12 in Louisiana, conducted by Drs. Westphal, Stevens and Rush of the LSU Medical School in Shreveport, developed an even more disturbing level of over 16 percent of youth with some level of gambling problem. This is the largest, most comprehensive adolescent study that's ever been done.

Video poker seems to be especially troublesome for a portion of our population. It appears to progress especially quickly and perhaps can be credited with being very high on all the components which make a gambling activity exciting and attractive to the average person but potentially addictive to the problem gambler. Dr. Robert Hunter of Las Vegas, Nevada identifies those as: immediacy, ability to increase, perception of skill, ability to lose yourself. And I'd like to add an additional one which I refer to as the "two cherry syndrome" and that's intermittent rewards. Of course, all of us know that the most reinforcing possible intermittent reward is the near miss.

It's our belief, then, that there's a sufficient degree of problem at various levels in our population to indicate some treatment interventions. That's what I'd like to talk about now is the solution.

A most fortuitous development for the problem gambler and his or her family took place in 1996. Mr. Alton E. "Jake" Hadley, with the encouragement and support of some of us who were
serving on the Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse at that time, was appointed to direct the State Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. He came with energy, knowledge, commitment and a firm conviction that problem gambling is an addiction which should be addressed accordingly, and properly belongs in the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment. We agreed with that.

He began working diligently, with then Secretary of Department of Health and Hospitals Bobby Jindal, to develop and implement the department's compulsive and problem gambling seven point action plan. The work has continued uninterrupted under the current secretary, Mr. David Hood.

The plan has been previously provided to the commissioners, so I will not repeat it in detail, but the highlights included: increased enforcement of age restrictions; improvement of the Problem Gambling Helpline; raising the minimum age to 21 for all forms of gambling; and the development of effective treatment approaches -- all of which have been accomplished.

Using monies provided by gaming taxes, the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, under Mr. Hadley's leadership, installed outpatient treatment programs for problem gamblers throughout the state in all ten regions of the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. I consult with him in that process.

With the help and assistance of interested and committed legislators such as Representative Charles Riddle, State Senator Jay Dardenne, and the support of others such as the support of Representatives Cedric Glover and Pinky Wilkerson, the
amount of funding from gaming taxes available for treatment was increased by over 300 percent.

With the assistance of, and some funding by the State Lottery, billboards promoting the Gambler's Hotline were installed all over the state, and if you drove in from Mississippi, you doubtless saw them.

Representatives of the gaming industry and the Casino Association of Louisiana made major donations in order to provide training for their employees on compulsive gambling and underage gambling issues.

The development of a major pathological gambling prevention plan was begun by the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in conjunction with Louisiana State University. The plan is scheduled for completion, announcement and implementation in October 1998, next month, in Shreveport at our annual conference.

A follow-up to the 1995 Volberg Prevalence Study will be initiated very soon in conjunction with the University of New Orleans and with the concurrence of the Gaming Control Board in Louisiana.

And now the real coup, something that to my awareness no other state government is doing: we will open in northwest Louisiana a residential treatment center for compulsive gamblers unable to maintain abstinence in an outpatient setting, prior to the end of this year. This is a fact of which we're extremely proud. Wonderful, indeed it is, to be a part of the solution rather than part of the problem; we're proud of that. We've been asked by the state to facilitate in operating this program.
We will utilize a proven combination of group and individual therapies, education, nutrition and involvement in the 12-step recovery process. This we believe to be the most effective method of addressing the problem. It's patterned after the highly successful Bracksville VA programs designed by Dr. Custer, and Dr. Hunter's program at Charter Las Vegas. I dare say we'll use some of your techniques, Doctor, in our work.

We have also some recommendations. It is our considered opinion, ladies and gentlemen, that other states could benefit from our experience, and we respectfully suggest that the following action steps be taken: number one, that a national prevalence study be undertaken to determine the severity of the problem and how it varies from region to region; number two, that consideration be given to the development of a national pathological gambling prevention plan; number three, that funding be provided for the Gambler's Helpline of the National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc. -- I serve on the helpline committee and am keenly aware of the financial need; and most importantly, that serious attention be given to funding treatment for problem gambling throughout the country.

For those who would say it's not our problem, we don't have legalized gambling, I would offer three comments. Number one, remember when my first call came? My first call for help came in 1982, long before Louisiana legalized riverboat casinos and other forms of gambling; it's been with us for a long time. Number two, all states except Utah and Hawaii have some form of gambling. Number three, experts have said that by the end of this decade no place in the country will be more than a
two-hour drive from some form of legalized gambling. We've never been there before, we don't know what's going to happen.

How will these initiatives be funded and how much will they cost? Well, I'll leave the amounts to those with great expertise, but we're making a good beginning here in Louisiana with a little less than $2 million. We will need more at some stage, but we must be good stewards of what we have first. I'll be happy to give the commissioners a breakdown of how that money is spent if you have an interest.

The proactive partnering joint venture concept between the gaming industry, state government, and non-profit agencies is working very well for us and could be used in other areas as well.

As far as where the funding can come from, it would seem that a federal tax on those gaming industries -- which do not currently pay much in the way of state taxes -- might be indicated, with perhaps some specific dedications of funds that are currently being received toward the treatment and prevention areas.

In closing, let me simply before the sign is held up that if you don't think our approach will work, try it; and if you don't think we'll help you, ask us.

Thank you very much for the privilege of addressing you and thank you indeed for your attention.

CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you, Mr. Middleton.