MONSIGNOR JACK EGAN

MSGR. EGAN: For the record I'd like to remind the Honorable Mr. Witt that Dubuque is not the same as Chicago, and Chicago is not the same as Dubuque.

I'm going to talk to you about Chicago and its flirtation with casino gambling. I've been concerned about gambling for the past 30 years. I've read how gambler demographics break out. The glittering few occupy the top sliver. We know the opposite end of gambling's demographics, too, terrorized, exhausted, chasing their losses, converting plastic into more cash at the ATM, leaving babied to bake in closed up cars, dropping Social Security checks into slots quarter by quarter, betting the rent or any money they can score any way, that the next wager will get them back up to zero and mouthing the prayer that diagnoses an addict, "God, help me get out of this and I'll never do it again."

Gambling towns break down the same way. The glittering town top is Las Vegas, dazzling, detached in control, some call it a town with a single industry focus. Beneath the relentless welcome lies a hard nosed network of security, down to the penny forecasting, meticulous systems to camouflage the mob, murders, prostitution, robberies, rapes, suicides, all the crimes that always accompany gambling and might stand in the way of the single municipal mission to separate visitors from their cash.

On the other end are moribund spots like Atlantic City, Gary and now Detroit, or aging ailing riverboat towns with little left to lose, or the dirt road, dirt floor, dirt poor pockets of hopelessness like our Indian reservations. Chicago
was almost one of them a few years back. Our economy was bad, job market worse, public education deteriorating, crime escalating, the Loop was becoming uninhabitable, gangs were bringing crime into bungalow neighborhoods. We were losing self-confidence and hope.

When the magi from the desert promised civic renaissance, family entertainment, jobs, tourists and cash, our city fathers were set to sign up, until the Chicago River sprung a leak and flooded the Loop, tabling the project. I like to think it was providential and since then two things happened.

One, all our fears proved out in reality for towns that took the bait, we said gambling never changes its stripes and we were right. Two, Chicago revived without surrendering its character, integrity and identity to gambling. Our economy came back to life, jobs are plentiful, tourists are having a grand time with us, Chicago is looking and working like the world class city we are.

It's a city of neighborhoods, neither single minded nor desperate enough to risk home and family by laying a dicey bet on a dream. We're not cool like James Bond; we're not single minded like Las Vegas; and we're nowhere near as frantic as riverboat towns and Indian reservations. And that's precisely my point.

Chicago, first and foremost, is a real home town. While you're here, I hope you'll have time to notice, not only our breathtaking lake front and skyline, our extraordinary shopping and dining, our spot at the heart of the nation's transportation and financial markets, our parks and forest preserves, our newly renovated and reclaimed Loop, also our crime
rate dropping, public schools improving, our employment rate at an all-time high, our new construction, renovation, our clean and healthy new face, our vibrant beauty, our energy, our new river walks and Navy Pier, the way Chicagoans use and enjoy their home town. There's still an appetite for gambling among some Chicagoans. In fact, there are civic leaders who still envy the streams of cars that head west, north, south and east to gamble in other people's casinos nearby and to leave their tax revenues in someone else's coffers.

I'd like to remind our leadership when the gambling day is done, Chicago can come back to the comfort of reality and diversity of home. I'd like to remind them that casino gambling, whether land based or riverboat, changes a community's character forever. It's a bell that can never be unrung. Chicago still watches from a distance as legalized gambling cannibalizes its own from coast to coast.

And I'd like to remind them that Chicago is still only better. I hope you will feel welcome here in Chicago. Enjoy our home town. Explore it. Chicago is great town. May I say about casino gambling, we don't need it and if a referendum we were offered, we would not want it. Thank you very much.