

Casinos not the solution for school financing

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Casinos not the solution for school financing

By Ken Camp

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DALLAS—Texas legislators looking for revenue to fund public schools better not bet on casinos, the director of an Austin-based think tank told the Texans Against Gambling board of directors.

Casino-style gambling at racetracks and video slot machines generates only two cents on the dollar for the state, as opposed to the lottery's 28 cents per dollar for public education, said Rob Kohler of Common Sense & Sound Public Policy.

To generate the \$1.016 billion the lottery produced for public education in 2005 with its \$3.662 billion in sales, casino-style gambling would have to generate more than \$48 billion, he asserted.

"At a 93 percent prize payout, casino-style gambling and video lottery terminals require more than 13 times the annual sales of the lottery to generate the same amount of revenue to the state," Kohler said.

But while some lottery promoters might tout those statistics as justification

for the state-run numbers game, they fail to consider social costs, he noted. In the Houston area, he pointed out, lottery sales were highest in some of the legislatives districts where per capita income and educational levels were lowest.

Dallas County Assistant District Attorney Tim Gallagher sees illegal gambling as comparable to pornography—both “traditional sources of income for organized crime,” he said.

“I don’t think we need to profit from human weakness,” he said.

But Texas statutes regulating 8-liners—a type of video gambling terminal—are vague and complex, and operators face only misdemeanor offenses, he noted. Law enforcement agencies could crack down on illegal casino operations if legislators would clean up the language of the law and raise gambling offenses back up to a felony level, but he expressed little optimism that lawmakers would do it unless pressured by citizens.

“You don’t usually think about criminals having strong lobbies in the state capitol, but gambling and pornography do,” he said.

In its business session, the Texans Against Gam-bling board voted to affiliate with the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, to disband the inactive Texans Against Gambling Educational Foundation and to elect as officers Chairman Tom Wilbanks of Mesquite, Vice Chair John Thielepape of Arlington, Treasurer Jack Ballou of Arlington and Secretary Debbie Irby of Dallas.

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