

# Editorial: Gambling industry betting big on our money

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Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission presented a startling number during their report to the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board Tuesday morning, Feb. 18.

In 2021, Las Vegas Sands hired 19 lobbyists to advance pro-gambling legislation in Texas during the 87th Texas Legislative Session. This year? They've hired 103 such lobbyists ... of a total of 350 "lobbyists hired to represent gambling interests" in the 89th Texas Legislative Session.

I don't gamble. In fact, I oppose gambling. Despite my opposition, however, I don't typically rail against gambling. But when an industry—and gambling is an industry—feels the need to hire 350 lobbyists to advance its interests in any legislature, well, something smells fishy.

## The stakes

Lobbyists are paid for their work. [ZipRecruiter](#) shows, as of Feb. 12, the average annual salary of a lobbyist in Texas is \$47,460, with \$55,433 as a top salary.

For the sake of round numbers, let's say each of the gambling industry's lobbyists makes \$50,000. That would amount to \$17,500,000—a rounding error for people like the Adelsons and multinational corporations like Las Vegas Sands worth billions of dollars.

The [actual compensation range](#) for the 103 Las Vegas Sands lobbyists as reported by the Texas Ethics Commission is much greater than

ZipRecruiter shows, with some receiving far less and some receiving far more.

Not many have the financial wherewithal to hire even 19 lobbyists. But 350? You can bet the gambling industry doesn't plan to lose its shirt on that one.

And with the force of 350 lobbyists, the gambling industry is saying pretty clearly that billions of dollars just isn't enough for them. It is enough, however, to make a person ask, "Just who is the gambling addict?"

## **The addiction**

Speaking of gambling addiction, it's telling that the University of Nevada in Reno, of all places, includes on its "Online Degrees Blog" [a post about the dangers of gambling addiction](#) and resources for help overcoming it.

The post cites the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#), which claims "2.5 million U.S. adults are estimated to meet the criteria for a severe gambling problem in a given year. Another 5-8 million would be considered to have mild to moderate gambling problems."

Does it bother anybody else that somewhere between 7 million and 10 million U.S. adults have gambling problems?

But maybe 4 percent of U.S. adults struggling with gambling isn't a high enough percentage to convince us to deny the gambling industry its desires in Texas. Maybe that percentage needs to be more like 10 percent? Is that high enough?

# The problem

For those who don't gamble or who gamble a little bit once in a while—or who gamble a lot of money often but can take or leave gambling—here's what a gambling problem looks like: Basically, like being an alcoholic.

You think about it all the time. You need more and more. You're not very nice when you don't get it. You feel unable to control the urge. You know it's hurting you and those you love, but you do it anyway.

“In extreme cases, problem gambling can cause bankruptcy, legal problems, losing your job or your family, and thinking about suicide.”

Sure, let's make that easier. Let's give the gambling industry what it wants in Texas.

Hopefully, my sarcasm is obvious. In case it's not: No, let's not make that easier. Let's continue to say 'no' to the gambling industry and deny their efforts to expand gambling in Texas.

# The economics

Proponents of gambling tout the economic benefits to the states and communities in which casinos are located. They point to higher employment rates and tax revenue, while downplaying—if they even acknowledge—the costs to those same states and communities. They contend the economic benefits are worth it.

Education funding is one such benefit. So, let's consider that. Rob Kohler, a consultant with Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission provided the following numbers based on the 88th Texas Legislature's proposed gambling legislation.

In fiscal year 2024, the Texas lottery would generate \$8.389 billion in sales. For every dollar of that, about one quarter would go to Texas public education, for a total of \$1.98 billion.

Compare that with the proposal for casino-style and video lottery terminal revenue, with just under 2 cents of every dollar going to Texas public education. This means, to generate the same \$1.98 billion in education funds via casino-style and VLT gambling, \$101 billion would have to be wagered in Texas.

For a further comparison, the entire 2023 fiscal year expenditure on Texas public education was [\\$85.33 billion](#), with revenue coming from federal, state and local sources.

For the sake of argument, let's say all of that \$101 billion was going to come from Texans: If Texans have \$101 billion to fritter away at casinos, they definitely have \$85.33 billion to fund their own education—and without any revenue from the federal government or even education savings accounts.

## The game

The gambling industry is not looking out for us, our community or our state. It's not spending billions of dollars—not only on lobbyists, but also funding politicians' campaigns—to help us out. The gambling industry is after our money, and a lot of it. They simply can't get enough.

Most gamblers don't have a gambling problem. At least, they don't exhibit what is defined by clinicians as problem gambling. Even so, very few of them are beating the house. Most of them lose more than they win—which is just how the casinos want it.

I would say, "Never bet against the house," except it's in the Texas House

where gambling interests find their friendliest reception. We don't have to look further than [House Bill 2843](#) in the 88th Texas Legislative Session. It didn't ultimately pass, but it advanced much farther than it should have.

The gambling industry knows it's making a fortune off others' misfortune. It's designed to ensure it. Let's not fall for it. Let's send the gambling industry a clear message: No expansion in Texas.

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