

Voices: Gambling expansion won't solve education emergency in Texas

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No doubt you've seen the news stories about the [teacher walkouts in Oklahoma](#) and elsewhere. Now, Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallon is proposing to expand gambling in that state as a way of plugging a hole in its public-school financing.

Bad, bad idea.

The Oklahoma Lottery was proposed years ago to citizens of that state as a way of helping public schools. But in the years that followed, Oklahoma's comparative ranking among the states went *down*, not up, and Oklahoma now ranks 50th among the states in state education funding.

So much for rosy predictions.

The fact is that gambling revenue is an unreliable, ineffective means of financing public education. Gambling also carries high social consequences: increases in crime (especially financial crime), addiction, domestic violence and suicide, among others.

Increasing gambling for 'education emergency'?

Texans' interest in the topic became more direct recently when Andrew White—son of former Texas Gov. Mark White and current candidate for governor—proposed increasing gambling as a way of dealing with Texas'

“education emergency.”

To be clear, Texans Against Gambling/Stop Predatory Gambling neither supports nor opposes individual candidates for any office. We merely endorse or oppose ideas.

In this instance, we oppose the idea of expanding gambling as an attempt to increase tax revenues, whether for education or anything else. Besides the social consequences, it just doesn’t work—and our neighbors in Oklahoma are Exhibit A. And there are others.

Like Oklahoma, Texas voters passed a lottery largely on the promise of providing *additional funding* for public schools. But in the years that followed, Texas decreased state tax funding for public education, and lottery funds began to be used to *replace* tax dollars, not *supplement* them.

Proponents of the lottery correctly state that the Texas Lottery had funded education to the tune of a billion dollars, as of the 2012 Texas Sunset Commission hearings on the Lottery Commission. But the bottom line is this: *The Texas Lottery has not contributed enough money to Texas public schools to buy so much as a pencil that wouldn’t have had to be bought anyway if the Lottery did not exist.*

Public schools will be hurt, not helped

Another important link between Texas and the gambling industry in Oklahoma lies in the number of gambling operations in Texas that have been bought by Oklahoma Native American tribes.

Most notably, these include Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie, a racetrack purchased out of bankruptcy in 2012 by Global Gaming LSP, a subsidiary of the Chickasaw Nation [of Oklahoma]. Since receipts from racing have declined nationwide, it doesn’t take much speculation to conclude that a

major motive for the purchase was the hope that Texas could be persuaded to expand gambling.

If Texas expands gambling, public schools will be hurt, not helped. Just look at Oklahoma, but look also at states like Pennsylvania and Illinois that have gone all-in on legalized gambling. Their state budgets are, to put it charitably, a mess. Increasing legalized gambling creates a host of problems and solves none.

We do not have to guess what would happen if gambling were expanded in Texas. We have history—both ours and our neighbors' north of the Red River.

To put it bluntly, those who want to expand gambling in Texas are the perfect customers for gambling enterprises.

They like to lose.

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