THE EVILS OF GAMBLING
HON. FRANK R. WOLF
OF VIRGINIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, September 19, 2014

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I have long been opposed to any expansion of legalized gambling and have continually sought to raise awareness of the dangerous economic and social costs of gambling. That is why I want to submit for the RECORD a statement I received from an expert on the dangers of gambling. The dangers of gambling, Tom Grey, and the director of Stop Predatory Gambling, Les Bernal.

STATEMENT BY LES BERNAL, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, STOP PREDATORY GAMBLING AND TOM GREY, SENIOR ADVISOR TO STOP PREDATORY GAMBLING

Today, we would seek to speak for the “losers.” The “losers” are those citizens sacrificed by our government in its failed experiment of sponsoring and promoting gambling to extract as much money as possible from the public. “Losers” isn’t a term we coined. That’s the word used by a slot machine designer who designed the biggest machines. He said: “When I met one I.G.T. artist if he ever plays, he acted as if I had insulted him.” wrote New York Times reporter Gary Rivlin in his cover story on slot machines for “The Times Sunday Magazine.” “Slots are for losers,” he spat, and then, coming to his senses, begged me to consider that an off-the-record comment.

Scott Stevens was one of these “losers” who we speak for today. Yet Scott Stevens was a success by nearly every measure we use in America. Through hard work and sacrifice, Scott became a very successful business executive, earning an upper-middle class income. He was happily married with three daughters and actively served his community in a variety of different volunteer leadership roles.

But the lives of Scott Stevens and his family changed forever when they intersected with a governmental program unlike any other. It is a government program that exists to extract as much money as possible from its citizens and yet the program the government has so inexcusably called “government-sponsored gambling” and a growing number of Americans in the public square today call it more accurately as “predatory gambling.”

Predatory gambling is when government uses gambling in the form of casinos and lotteries to cheat and exploit citizens. For-profit gambling is illegal unless the government gives its full support, and in nearly every instance operates in partnership with gambling interests whether in the form of state lotteries or even casinos or tribal casinos. Scott Stevens knew firsthand about predatory gambling.

Today, the electronic gambling machine has become government’s preferred method of extracting money from citizens. Slots make up to 80% of gambling profits. These gambling machines are literally designed so citizens can use them, and the slots themselves—features of human psychology and inducing irrational and responsive behavior. Every feature of a slot machine—its mathematical structure, sounds, art, and seating screen ergonomics—is designed to increase a player’s “time on device”—which means how long a person plays.

Gamblers have found that their profits were not about the size of the gamblers’ stakes but rather the volume of their play. “If you provide them with the right time-on-device, they will stay and play.” one slot designer said to MIT Professor Dr. Natasha Schull in her recent book on slot machine technology entitled, By Design. “If you take it too quickly and they lose, they’re going to leave.” In the actual language of the casino business, the goal is to get every player addicted—until all their money is gone. Dr. Schull quotes a slot marketing expert. “I want to keep you there as long as humanly possible.” another slot operator explained. “That’s the whole trick, that’s what makes you lose.”

The slot machine is designed to be so effective, broken from people, wrote Dr. Schull, that it is “a product that, for all intents and purposes, approaches every player as a potential addict” in other words, someone who is playing until his or her means are depleted.

Scott Stevens was one of the “losers” who used a slot machine. He became someone who used the slot machine the way its maker and promoter intended: he could not stop using it. “Aggressively marketed to the public as ‘fun’ and actively promoted by public officials, why would Scott ever possess any concerns about using a modern slot machine?”

But the lives of Scott Stevens and his family have ruined their lives and painfully wounded their families. Our government has taken over almost everything he had to this point. If the United States government has any one goal, it is to extract as much money as possible from citizens. That is why I want to speak for the “losers” who we speak for today.

Our country simply repudiated the virtue of “love your neighbor as yourself.” It has repudiated the value of thrift by creating a giant excise tax on the citizenry that politicians never have to call a “tax.”

It has failed to deliver on its over-hyped promises to fund education or pay for needed public services.

It has taken political power away from the people and handed it over to gambling lobbyists.

It has perpetrated a phony model of economic development—a model with a multiplier effect of approximately zero since, in this model, nothing of value is produced.

It has promulgated the very economic attitude of “gambling” practices—‘short-term is more important than sustainable, wealth can come from ever-growing debt, something can come from nothing, slickness trumps honesty—that led us into the debt bubble and the Great Recession of 2008 and beyond.

It has caused neighboring states to compete against each other in a race to the bottom.

It has taken dollars from the poor to fund programs for the better-off.

It has spread addiction into our population, using the new science of machine design to produce out-of-control behavior that, according to scientists, closely resembles addiction behavior from cocaine.

It has spread debt and bankruptcy into our population.

It has contributed to serious gambling-related problems among young people.

It has exposed citizens to criminal gambling.”

It has contributed to broken families and child neglect and other social messes everywhere it goes, and has taken little or no responsibility to clean them up.

It has turned many law-abiding citizens into criminals who cheat, steal, and embezzle in order to continue to gamble.

It has arrogantly exempted itself from truth-in-advertising laws so that it can use taxpayer money to create and spread deceptive advertising.

It has corrupted our sense of community and undermined our faith that we’re all in this together.

It has deliberately changed the word “gambling” to “gaming” in order to make this often destructive activity sound as innocent and child’s play.

It has fueled cynicism about the motives of our government.

It has taken the value of thrift by creating mass incentives to turn potential savers into habitual bettors.

It has repudiated the virtue of “love your neighbor” and repudiated the endorsement of predatory practices, or preying on human weakness for gain.
It has withered our capacity as a people to confront forthrightly our reluctance to pay taxes for the public services we desire. It has tramelled on the ideal of “justice for all.”

It has broken faith with the wisdom and leaders of earlier generations who, seeing the failure of gambling in the past, amended state constitutions to ban gambling activities. It has lied to us about how the government actually uses the money it gets from gambling. It has lied to us by repeating again and again that luck—rather than work—is the key to the American dream.

This is a critical moment. How our generation responds to the reach and arrogance of the government-gambling power complex will limit the legacy we pass on to the next generation. Politically, economically, ethically, and spiritually, the stakes are extraordinarily high.

Politically: Government’s partnership with gambling fundamentally changes the compact between government and the governed. It pits government’s interests against the best interests of the people. For government to win, its citizens must lose.

Economically: No great nation has ever built its wealth on the foundation of social debt, addiction, and the steady expansion of “businesses” that produce no new wealth. Relying on gambling as an economic development strategy is a sign of surrender and defeat on the part of leaders who have failed to lead.

Ethically: A decent government does not finance its activities by playing its most vulnerable citizens for suckers, thus rendering the lives of millions expendable, exploitable, and unworthy of protection.

Spiritually: We mock the higher values that any good society depends on—honesty, mutual trust, self-discipline, sacrifice, concern for others, and a belief in a work ethic that connects effort and reward—when government tells its citizens every day that it is committed to providing “fun” instead of opportunity; that a rigged bet is the way to achieve the American dream; and that spending one’s hard-earned dollars on scratch tickets is a form of good citizenship.

This is America. Surely we can do better than this. The choice is not—it has never been—between tying our future to gambling and accepting economic decline. Government-sponsored gambling is itself a sign of economic decline. The American nation needs to muster the courage to chart a path to true prosperity. An America freed from the yoke of government-sponsored gambling, sustained by the reaching and ambition of its people, will achieve the American dream; and that spending one’s hard-earned dollars on scratch tickets is a form of good citizenship.

HON. STEVE STIVERS
OF OHIO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, September 19, 2014

Mr. STIVERS, Mr. Speaker, on October 10th Taiwan celebrates its National Day, commonly referred to as “Double Ten Day” because of its occurrence on the tenth day of the tenth month. On Double Ten Day, Taiwanese citizens pause and honor its first glimpse of becoming an independent and self-governing country.

Exactly six months ago, on April 10th, the United States and Taiwan celebrated a special anniversary—the 35th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act. This bill passed Congress and was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter in 1979. The Taiwan Relations Act was crucial in establishing a legal relationship between our country and that of Taiwan.

The Taiwan Relations Act has been mutually beneficial to both the United States and Taiwan—boosting our economies and establishing a confidence of protection to the newly-established democracy of Taiwan.

The people of Taiwan have contributed to our thriving economy in many ways—and for that, we are grateful. In fact, just last year, Taiwan imported nearly $26 billion worth of American goods. In Ohio alone we have seen an increase from exports to Taiwan—making the country Ohio’s 5th largest Asian export market.

We are grateful for Taiwan’s friendship and look forward to many more years of this successful partnership.