

Gambling laws make no sense

Support for legalized gambling in Georgia is definitely growing. Recently the Macon City Council, the Fulton County Commission, the Business Council of Georgia, and (according to polls) a majority of the people of the state have all come out in favor of a referendum to allow state lotteries or pari-mutuel betting or both.



The reasons are clear. State lotteries and horse racing offer great potential benefits to Georgia: increased revenue, additional jobs, new forms of recreation. And it is certainly far better to raise government funds by voluntary means such as gambling than by squeezing yet more dollars out of Georgia's beleaguered taxpayers.

The only trouble with these proposals is that they are far too timid. State lotteries and pari-mutuel betting are fine in and of themselves, but we should go further: we should abolish all laws against commercial gambling in the state.

Gambling casinos, slot machines, bingo parlors, betting shops, bookies and so on should all be perfectly legal in Georgia,

as legal as grocery stores or restaurants. We should, in one fell swoop, wipe all laws prohibiting commercial gambling off the books.

There is no good reason for local and state governments to waste their time and limited law enforcement resources on preventing people from gambling with their own money. The notion is not only senseless, it is downright tyrannical. If some people find pleasure in betting on sporting events or pumping change into slot machines, they should certainly be free to do so. It is none of the government's business.

The tired old arguments against legal gambling simply don't hold up under rational analysis. The stock-in-trade of the anti-gambling forces—grim tales of families left starving while

wayward husbands gamble away the rent and grocery money—is mostly the stuff of bad melodrama. For the overwhelming majority of participants, gambling is simply a harmless recreation that adds a bit of fun and excitement to life.

It makes no more sense to prohibit gambling because of a few unwise gamblers than it does to ban all automobiles because of irresponsible drivers, or to outlaw chocolate cake and ice cream to protect gluttons from eating themselves sick.

The often-expressed fear that legalized (or, more properly, decriminalized) gambling would lure organized crime into the state is equally groundless. The high profits that attract organized crime to gambling exist only because gambling is an illegal,

black market activity. If gambling were a legal, above-ground enterprise, competition and the workings of the marketplace would drive the profits down to a reasonable level, and insure that the fairest and most efficient gambling businesses would meet with the greatest success.

Organized crime would find itself unable to compete in such conditions. Decriminalization would drive racketeers out of gambling just as the repeal of Prohibition halted gangster involvement in the liquor industry.

Many people oppose legal gambling on moral and religious grounds, charging that gambling is sinful and should therefore be prohibited by law. However, "sin" is an elusive concept. What is sinful to one person is often simply innocent amusement to others.

There are those who earnestly and sincerely believe that watching movies or smoking cigarettes are grave moral crimes. Others are sure that when a woman dabs a bit of rouge on her cheeks she is risking the very flames of Hell. In our society there are many differing views on matters of personal moral conduct, and it is tyrannical and dangerous to allow one group to use the power of government to

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shove their particular moral or religious beliefs down everyone else's throats.

Those who believe that gambling is wrong should be free to use such peaceful means as picketing, boycotts, leafletting and so on to try to persuade others of the merits of their views. But they should not be allowed to dictate morality at gunpoint to the rest of Georgia.

I know of no statistics on how many Georgians gamble at present on such things as card games, the outcome of football matches, and the like; but surely the number is enormous. It is simply outrageous that such innocent, harmless activities are illegal, and that large amounts of tax dollars are regularly thrown away in enforcing such unwise and oppressive laws.

Decriminalizing gambling in Georgia would not only greatly benefit our state in a number of ways, it is the only position consistent with our political heritage of tolerance and personal freedom.