

# VILLAGE VIEW

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There appears to be confusion in some people's minds about whether it's a good thing to use the public schools during hours they're not occupied by students for Bingo games.

A former member of the school committee states flatly that the schools should be used as much of the time as possible. Prominent businessmen champion the playing of the games at the schools. A village fire chief is solidly in favor of it.

To be heard above the voices of the proponents, a few strident speakers raise questions of morality. For the most part, it seems, those in opposition are drowned out by supporters.

We can't deny Bingo makes money for the organizations operating the games. There's the argument that the money raised goes for good causes. Whether it does or doesn't isn't the real point, though; the questions to be addressed are: Is Bingo gambling? And, if Bingo is gambling, is gambling good? And if gambling isn't good, and Bingo is gambling, should Bingo be condoned in school buildings?

Even if it does raise money for good causes...

Let's first define gambling: any dictionary will confirm gambling is playing a game for money. The reason people play Bingo is to win money. Can you imagine a crowd gathering to play Bingo if no money were involved? Would Bingo players arrive in droves to win matchsticks, toothpicks or pebbles?

Of course they wouldn't. Therefore, Bingo is not a game played for fun; it's played for money. If there weren't some remote chance of winning money, attendance would fall to nothing. Ergo, Bingo is gambling.

Is gambling good? Hardly anyone can describe it as uplifting. It's an activity based on the assumption a player can get something for nothing. The odds against a gambler winning are overwhelming. He's playing against a stacked deck.

Proof of it lies within the proponents' own arguments: the Bingo games make a lot of money, they say, and the money goes for good causes such as equipment for fighting fires, new buildings for religious organizations, and for charitable organizations. It doesn't cost the schools anything to stay open because the profits provide enough to pay custodians to keep the schools open while the games go on.

Where does all the money come from? From Bingo aficionados, of course; where else?

That clearly adds up to one thing: Bingo players are losing money. All the profit comes from somewhere. The only source is the people who attend the games. If there were no chance to win money, if the stakes were worthless, no one would pay to play. If chances of winning were even as high as fifty-fifty, there'd be little profit to distribute to those good causes.

It seems clear, then, the schools are being used to bilk the public. Let's look again at the discussion of how the money is used. The reasoning seems to be that if the proceeds go for good causes, then how the cash is raised shouldn't be questioned. The ends justify the means.

If one accepts this, then why not use the schools in other ways to raise money? After the Bingo players clear out in the evening, the school cafeteria could do double duty as a disco, complete with pouring license for alcoholic beverages. Think of the money to be raised for all those good causes!

And, once the bar closes, schools could continue being put to good use for the balance of the night as bordellos. All in the name of raising money for good causes, you understand.

If you think that's stretching a point, then where do you want to draw the line? And why draw the line at all?

If the schools were to be used in the wee small hours of the morning for illicit relationships, would that have any effect on the morals of the children who occupy the building during the day for educational purposes? It could be argued that there's no carry-over from one situation to the other. We could probably make schools self-supporting if we carried this to its logical conclusion.

We all know, however, that such uses for schools are inappropriate. There's no chance students wouldn't know what was going on in their classrooms before they arrived for their daily learning experiences.

Even the suggestion of such use of schools will offend many of our citizenry. It should. And it should offend all of us, just as deeply, when schools are used for gambling.

While the business of schools is education, the business of the community is to provide a healthy environment for youngsters. A healthy environment for our youth doesn't include gaming for money, particularly not in our schools.

What the profits are used for makes not the slightest difference. There's little doubt the schools can rake in all sorts of income if our standards of acceptable behavior are so eroded we actually put the schools to work on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis to make from them all the money possible.

That's not how decent people want school taxes spent. The purpose of schools is to educate children in order that they may grow to become self-respecting, self-supporting, responsible adults. If school children are aware their classrooms are used for gambling at night (and you can't hope to keep them from finding out what's going on in their classrooms while they're gone), you may rest assured the message the children will receive is that gambling is respectable, a good way of life, a harmless form of entertainment.

Is it?

The compulsive gambler plays with money he and his family need for housing, food, clothing- all the necessities of life. The odds are infinitesimal he will come out ahead. Everything, every gambling game, is fixed to make certain he will lose.

The gambler becomes the embezzler, the thief, the con artist, the criminal. He keeps playing, hoping for a run of luck, believing somehow he can beat the system, certain his luck will change sooner or later, praying he can cover his losses and make a killing. He begs, borrows and steals a try, just once more, to break even, or come out ahead of the game. If he wins back part of his losses, he doesn't quit; he goes for broke.

Is using schools for gambling setting a good example for children? It is not. It makes a travesty of our educational facilities, facilities into which we, the taxpayers, have poured (willing or not) literally millions of our hard-earned dollars. To educate our children.

When the school committee meets to consider the question of using school building for Bingo games, I hope they will consider the possibilities for the next few steps toward degradation of our educational institutions.

It's a far shorter step from gambling hall to barroom to brothel than may appear at first glance.

No matter how "laundered" dirty money is, it's still dirty money. Good causes deserve the support of the community; if they are truly worthy, those good people who espouse the good causes will support them financially.

Gambling and gamblers have no place in public schools.