

# VILLAGE VIEW

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There's dirtywork afoot in the legislature. There's a bill before our state representatives and senators to legalize gambling on Cape Cod and in Berkshire County in the western part of the state. This isn't the first time Barnstable and Berkshire Counties have been threatened with this proposition; it probably won't be the last. Always before the voters have successfully fought the move. To accomplish that again requires united concern and action, just as it has in the past.

Why bother? What difference does it make? What's wrong about legalized gambling? There are, after all, plenty of places where it flourishes, so why not here? It'll attract more tourists, won't it? It'll bring more business to Cape Cod, won't it? Why fight it? Why not welcome it?

Those are fair questions. Those are questions that should be asked and ought to be answered. There's little point in fighting battles against harmless enterprises.

Let's examine this one.

The first argument you'll hear is that gambling is morally wrong; that's debatable, of course. There are those who'll say there's nothing immoral about it, that people will gamble whether it's legal or not and better to make it legal than to force gamblers to do so illegally. Better to legitimize it than drive the honest to criminal acts.

Taken from the foundation, then, what's wrong with gambling? Basically, it's an invitation to "get something for nothing." The belief that something of value can be obtained at little or no cost extends a false hope; there's no such thing as a free lunch. Gambling, then, is based on that lie. The lie is immoral.

Encouraging people to hope they may win a large amount of money by investing a bit of pocket change is a deceit; it's a

deceit that's been perpetrated for centuries, because there are always the dreamers who have faith in their "luck". And there are always the operators who take advantage of those dreamers, who hold out promises of possible gains, and who are the only ones who truly stand to make a killing.

The "house" never loses. The suckers almost always lose. The only real winners are the ones who run the show; the players have always been and will always be the marks, the source of wealth for those who prey upon the hopeful but naive.

The kind of people who operate the games look upon those who play as pawns and fools. They care nothing for the sorrow they bring, nothing for the misery that inevitably results when the gambling fever strikes, nothing for the losses not only in dollars, but in homes, jobs, self-esteem and community respect.

They care nothing for the person who believes in luck, who gambles, first his own money, and then, when that's gone, steals someone else's with the hope of recouping his losses. When that, too, is gone, when the now-desperate gambler can't meet his debts, threats follow. Violence follows. It's a filthy business.

Cape Cod has been a family vacationland for years; its broad beaches, mild climate, lovely scenery, tree-lined streets, old houses, fine residential neighborhoods, good restaurants, nice shops, excellent and plentiful accommodations, good theatre and entertainment have, for decade after decade, attracted the middle-class American family to our shores. Those people are the backbone of our tourist trade.

With gambling comes a different type of visitor. Not only comes the element who operate the gaming tables, but comes the avaricious, the opportunists, the glittery-eyed money-hungry. They check in, spend all their waking hours in the casino, play 'til they're cleaned out, and leave. Their attire may be elegant, but their hearts and hopes are strictly shabby. They're bent on a win, a hit, a strike; when they're broke, they sneak away leaving a string of unpaid bills behind.

Not only does legalized gambling attract gamblers from a distance, it lures the unwary who live amongst us here at home.

We have, in our Commonwealth, a legal numbers game. It pays off every day- peanuts compared to the dollars that flow in. In many public places tickets for The Game are sold. You've watched people buying tickets. I've watched them too. I've watched while a woman wearing worn clothing, run-over-at-the-heels shoes, pushing a meagerly filled basket through the check-out at a supermarket counted out pennies and food stamps to pay for food. I've watched her children wait while

their mother spent a dollar or two on The Game.

Such people cannot afford to play The Game, but the temptation to do so is too great. The false promise of a possible win is more than they can withstand. A dollar or two here, a dollar or two there; soon what little they had is gone and children go hungry while some gamblers get richer.

You've read in newspapers of people who've stolen to pay gambling debts, of people who've embezzled funds entrusted to them, of people disgraced, imprisoned even, as a result. You may even have known someone who's gone through such an experience. If you have, you can attest to the degradation, the disgrace, the damage to home, family, and loved ones of the person involved.

The Game is not good for Massachusetts. Legalized gambling is not good for Barnstable County. It's a trap, a softly-lit, beautifully furnished, handsomely appointed, but vicious, trap.

It's a trap I'd prefer not to see introduced to Cape Cod. There's been enough despoilation of this beloved sand dune, as it is. And we do have a choice. We can fight against this evil thing certain people would like to see established here.

Why, if it's so terrible, does anyone promote it?

Those who profit by gambling want to expand and enlarge their take. To expand they need the approval of the legislature and the acceptance of the community. It's much less risky to operate legally; it's relatively easy to achieve when enough palms are greased unless there's strong local objection. After all, there's plenty of money to buy votes; it's a good investment. Once approved, the field is wide open. The return on the investment is indeed excellent. And, in general, the public is apathetic, unaroused, unwilling to bestir itself.

Fighting crime can be a dangerous business; fighting legalized immorality can also be a dangerous business. It's a battle we all have a responsibility to join, however; it's a fight that can't be won by a handful of dedicated people. Only an aroused and concerned citizenry can swing enough weight to overcome the power of the pay-off.

There's a great deal at stake. A way of life for Cape Cod residents hangs in the balance. We've seen the Cape change, over the years; some changes have been for the better, some for the worse. We'll inevitably see it change again, as time goes on; how it changes, and the ways those changes come, lie within our power to influence.

Together and united we can prevent undesirable changes such as legalized gambling in Barnstable County. Promise yourself, in this instance, not to "Leave it to George". Promise yourself to make your voice heard and your weight felt.

You'll be glad you did.