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State, Casino Industry Ignore Problem Gambling

By [Dr. Guy C. Clark / Chairman, Stop Predatory Gambling New Mexico](#) on Fri, Aug 31, 2012

In a recent Albuquerque Journal article, Keith Whyte, the executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling, complimented New Mexico for the compact requirement that tribes and tracks have of contributing one-fourth of one-percent of net income toward problem gambling prevention and cure. It amounts to about \$2 million per year, which is better than many states.

Still, it is a pathetic token amount to throw at the problem, and the state has no control over how most of it is spent. Typical costs for treatment center plans are often \$20,000 to \$30,000 per patient, and the success rate is not very high.

That amount would possibly help to treat about 75 to 100 problem gamblers, if the money were actually spent on treating gamblers. Reports to the New Mexico Gaming Control Board revealed that some of the tribes have co-mingled treatment money with a list of other problems, such as suicide prevention, marriage and family counseling, etc., or just put it in the tribal general fund.

State-funded studies indicate that there could be as many as 40,000 to 70,000 problem gamblers in the state, a pitiful few of which benefit from this money.

Stop Predatory Gambling New Mexico has repeatedly called for all the treatment money to be sent to the New Mexico Department of Health to make sure that independent health care professionals decide where the funds would be allocated.

The fact is that if all of the gambling revenue were spent on gambling addiction treatment, it would not be nearly enough to compensate for the flood of social and economic devastation that is caused by the gambling expansion that has occurred in New Mexico.

Broken homes, child and spouse abuse, bankruptcies, drug addiction, criminal activity to raise gambling money and suicide have all dramatically increased in New Mexico because of the expansion of gambling in the last 16 years.

Compounding the failure of the state to solve the problem, scores of studies in the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand have shown that over 50 percent of casino gambling revenue comes from problem gamblers. Gary Loveman, the CEO of Harrah's, famous for his loyalty programs in their casinos across the globe, is reported to have revealed that 90 percent of their income comes from 10 percent of the patrons. This 10 percent is largely made up of average citizens who are out of control, emptying their bank accounts, borrowing or stealing from friends and relatives, maxing out their credit cards and committing crimes to raise gambling money.

“Entertainment gamblers” are incidental to the business plan for casinos. The gambling “industry” would go out of business without the addicts.

Industry cautions about “gambling responsibly” are mainly window dressing and PR. Gambling revenue is largely blood money, pure and simple, and the government is up to its ears in it.

“Normalizing” the conversation about gambling, or pretending that the state approved and promoted predatory gambling is the new “normal” to be embraced, is white-washing over a rotten corpse. It is time to clearly analyze the damage that predatory gambling has done to the state and get the government out of the gambling business.