

Looking In: End gambling-government collusion

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Sunland Park is the poster child for the poisonous relationship between government and gambling. The city government of Sunland Park, and pretty much the whole town, is an appendage to the Sunland Park racetrack/casino (racino).

Martin Resendiz, the mayor of Sunland Park, is quoted as saying, "Economically, we are very tied to them." And again: "Most of our citizens have some kind of connection to the racetrack. They are the big attraction for us, so they are our focal point when we promote the city." The racino has lavished large amounts of money on the town for years.

Are we surprised that multiple contracts have been signed by city officials while they were reported to be intoxicated?

Are we surprised that, when candidates for city office, now under arrest, along with five others charged, lured an opposing candidate into a video-recorded encounter with a topless lap-dancer, and attempted to extort him to get him out of the contest?

Are we surprised when a local district attorney calls on the state auditor, Hector Balderas, to investigate alleged misappropriation of city funds by the current city administration?

According to their own statements, Sunland Park racino makes more than 80 percent of its net income from slot machines. Various scientists have described slot machines as the "crack cocaine of gambling." Christina Brinkley, a Wall Street Journal investigative reporter, in her book *Winner Takes All* quotes Harrah's Inc., one of the largest casino chains in the world, saying that 90 percent of its revenue comes from 10 percent of its patrons. Refining the results further, government and university studies in the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand reveal that more than 50 percent of slot-machine revenue comes from about 4 percent of the gamblers, who are the out-of-control problem gamblers. A Nova Scotia government study actually found that more than 70 percent of slot-machine revenue in its province came from problem gamblers. Casino

owners are very aware of all these facts.

That means several things:

- The entertainment gambler is incidental to the business model for the casino industry;
- The out-of-control problem gambler is the lifeblood of the casino industry. No matter how much they talk about "gambling responsibly," they would close their doors without the addicts.

With this bloodthirsty, grab-all-the-money-you-can-get mentality, while exploiting vulnerable people, the casino generates the business and ethical climate that becomes the pattern for the town. Why should it surprise anyone that "casino capitalism" creates the ethical void that affects the gambling industry and the supporting government agencies?

Citizens of New Mexico should make their voices heard in opposition to the poisonous collusion between predatory gambling and the government. New Mexicans can join citizens, business and political leaders from around the country in signing the "American Declaration on Government and Gambling" by going to www.stop-predatorygambling.org and waiting for the declaration to rotate up on the banner line. That will give the links to reading the document and signing it.

It's time to reject the failed government policy of predatory gambling.

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