

The Baptist Standard™



End the Unfairness and Inequality Created By
Government-Sponsored Casinos and Lotteries

2nd Opinion: Anti-gambling archives a treasure trove of wisdom

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By Rodger Weems

This summer, [Stop Predatory Gambling Texas](#) employed an intern who was asked to digitize 40 years of archives on the anti-gambling movement collected by Weston Ware, who represented Texas Baptists on moral and ethical issues for many of those years.

Without Weston's diligence in preserving and storing those archives, four decades of priceless history would have been lost. The very capable intern, incidentally, was Pablo Gonzales, grandson of the late Rudy Sanchez, former chairman of the Texas Baptist Executive Board.



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Our organization has been known by four names. Originally chartered as the Anti-Crime Council of Texas, it later was called Texans Who Care, then Texans Against Gambling, before taking its current name—Stop Predatory Gambling Texas.

In addition to our own organization's records, the archives are taken from the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission (now Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission), as well as from The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. And it's worth noting the *Baptist Standard* appears prominently, as well.

There were, of course, the usual minutes and financial statements. Far from dull or academic, the four decades of records, when read as a unit, provide some amazing take-always:

- ***Incredible pain.***

While Stop Predatory Gambling Texas is an advocacy agency, not a therapy group, the records contain many stories of families and individuals devastated by gambling addiction.

There was a mother who lived in a casino town. Lonely, she used casinos as a social outlet, gambling away her savings and home in the process. Only after her death did her son learn the extent of her gambling.

There was the self-described "addicted gambler" who was invited by a Las Vegas casino to be the casino's guest for Super Bowl weekend. Predictably, he spent far more time gambling than watching the game. At one point, his gambling account at the casino was up by a million dollars. Knowing he was vulnerable, he asked the casino to wire most of his winnings to his hometown bank. Although he was given a receipt for the wire transfer, the casino never wired the money. And the gambler proceeded to lose all of his winnings and more.

There was the military veteran who cashed in his burial policy to play the lottery. When he died, his widow was devastated to learn the truth. His friends had to take up a collection to give him a modest funeral.

Anyone who dismisses gambling as harmless entertainment ignores the evidence. While Stop Predatory Gambling Texas does not provide therapy, we try to find a qualified therapist for problem gamblers who ask for it. The human cost of gambling is both real and widespread.

- ***Incredible sacrifice.***

I knew our organization's first chairman was legendary Baylor University President Abner McCall. I assumed his role was largely symbolic, but I could not have been more wrong. Judge McCall's leadership is all over our group's archives—presiding at meetings, writing letters, suggesting strategies, raising money. He was a hands-on leader! In fact, when he retired as Baylor president, he told his immediate successor involvement in the anti-gambling movement was part of the job. He was only half joking.

There was a report from Ware, mentioning he had made 13 trips from Dallas to Austin during a recent legislative session—*after* he retired from the [Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission](#). Some years, he recorded even more trips, particularly when the Texas Legislature met in special session.

There was a letter from our late treasurer Alan Griswood apologizing to the IRS for filing a document late. The reason for the tardiness? The death of his wife and his own serious illness, which we now know would later take his life. Yet he remained engaged and effective right up to the end.

We have had paid employees at times, but the anti-gambling movement in Texas has always been a labor of love. We oppose gambling expansion because gambling hurts people. No apologies for our passion.

• ***So what that we're always broke?***

Perhaps the most common phrase in our archives is “financial crisis.” While we refuse to spend money we don’t have, Stop Predatory Gambling Texas has made peace with being perpetually broke. We have figured out how to do more with less.

Texas’ neighboring states—New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana—have casinos or allow casino-like machines, but Texas has rejected casinos. We haven’t won every battle, but our side has won our share.

Time and again, we and our allies have beaten back gambling expansion on a shoestring. In 2015, slot machines at racetracks—called “historical racing”—were beaten back, and casino proposals in Texas once again were defeated. We certainly didn’t do it by ourselves, but we did our part. Among others, we especially are grateful to the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and its anti-gambling consultant, Rob Kohler. It’s great to have friends like that.

In fact, the experts have developed a rule of thumb: Pro-gambling advocates must spend at least \$11 for every \$1 the anti-gambling side spends to even have a chance of winning. I wouldn’t be surprised if the gap were even wider in 2015, and the pro-gambling side got almost nothing for its lobbying money this time.

In the very near future, we will post these archives on Dropbox or some similar Cloud-based site, making them available for years to come. The stories are too amazing to be lost to history. By the way, if some aspiring doctoral student is looking for a dissertation topic, the anti-gambling movement in Texas would make good reading.

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