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ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

ABQ anti-gambling activists join in national protest

By Ryan Boetel / Journal Staff Writer

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Demonstrators gathered outside the New Mexico Lottery offices on Saturday morning, burning losing and discarded lottery tickets while decrying the idea of allowing ticket purchases with credit cards, online and at the gas pump.

The group was focusing on failed legislation this year that would have allowed the purchase of lottery tickets using a debit card and at the gas pump. An original plan to allow credit card sales of lottery tickets wasn't voted on. The group fears similar legislation may be considered in the future.

Lottery officials, who couldn't be reached for comment on Saturday, have said allowing those transactions would increase sales and the scholarship money funded through the lottery.

"I'm not opposed to games of chance," state Sen. William Sharer, R-Farmington, said before the demonstration. "But with a credit card you can lose more money than you're capable of spending. That's when it becomes predatory."

Sharer said he hoped lawmakers could find other ways to increase scholarship money.

The rally's organizer, Guy Clark, chairman of Stop Predatory Gambling New Mexico, said the Albuquerque effort was part of a series of protests against gambling held across the nation on Saturday. In other cities, the demonstrations included sit-ins at casino slot machines and smashing other slot machines at state capitols, he said.

About 15 people attended the demonstration at the lottery offices on Osuna NE near Interstate 25.

"I feel like the gambling has gotten out of hand," said Kay Linde-Grotbeck of Cochiti Lake.

Sharer, along with several other protestors, said gambling addiction can lead to crime.

It was a fitting time for the message, Clark said, as the New Mexico Secretary of State was recently charged with felony embezzlement, fraud and money laundering because she had

allegedly been using campaign contributions for personal use while making hundreds of thousands of dollars of withdrawals at New Mexico casinos.

“She’s the poster child for what can happen when you become an addict,” he said. “This happens way too often. You have model citizens get addicted to gambling and they become felons.”