# How to Know If Your Choice for President Is the Real Thing

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By Les Bernal on February 16, 2016

Most people know a reheated biscuit is never going to be as good as a fresh-from-the-oven biscuit. All it takes is one bite and you know right away.

When it comes to determining the best candidate to support for president, there is no taste test to tell you the "fresh-from-the-oven" choice from the "reheated" ones.

But there is one major and often overlooked issue that can be more revealing than any other about whether a candidate has the ingredients to be an effective leader for the country.

That issue is the candidate's record on "The Big Con," also known by the label of government-sponsored gambling, and it takes place in the form of lotteries and regional casinos.

Whether or not you wager a dollar on any of government's gambling programs, this practice affects you.

No single act of government creates more inequality of opportunity than its promotion of gambling. Fueled by massive spending on advertising, marketing and campaign donations, politicians purposely concentrate gambling in economically-distressed communities. Financially desperate citizens have become ensnared in these government-run gambling schemes as a way to try

and improve their lives and help them escape their financial condition. It has become a Hail Mary investment strategy, doomed to inevitable failure. By targeting the least advantaged, government-sponsored gambling adds to the increasingly separate and unequal life patterns in education, marriage, work, and play that now are dividing America into haves and have-nots.

For the majority of citizens who never or rarely gamble, government-sponsored gambling is the biggest budget gimmick of all. Where states authorize commercial gambling, all taxpayers — including the non-gamblers — end up paying higher taxes for fewer services, and their states end up with worse budget problems over the long term, according to research by the Rockefeller Institute at SUNY-Albany. You pay even if you don't play.

America's most influential leaders, regardless of party, have traditionally been opposed to The Big Con. One of them, former President Ronald Reagan, has been mentioned more on the campaign trail than any other past politician. To give his impact some context, it was reported that in one of the Republican debates, the candidates invoked Reagan 42 times. They only invoked God 16 times.

How did Reagan feel about government-sponsored gambling? When he was asked for his position on a lottery for California, Reagan boldly declared: "I prefer to govern Californians based on their strengths, not their weaknesses."

For the first time in modern presidential politics, there are several candidates, who unlike Reagan, prefer to govern citizens based on their weaknesses. Hillary Clinton, John Kasich and Donald Trump each have been major boosters of commercial gambling and government's promotion of it.

Trump has been one of the country's most visible casino operators, running major casinos in Atlantic City and Las Vegas. "I left Atlantic City before it totally

cratered," he said at a Fox News debate for GOP candidates in August 2015. "And I made a lot of money in Atlantic City, and I'm very proud of it."

No great nation has ever built prosperity on the foundations of personal debt, addiction, and the steady expansion of businesses that produce no new wealth. Relying on gambling is a sign of surrender and defeat on the part of leaders who have failed to lead.

Government-sponsored gambling represents the absolute worst of crony-capitalism and big government. It pits government's interests against the best interests of its people. For government to win, its citizens must lose.

The alternative is to muster the courage to chart a path to true prosperity. An America freed from the yoke of government-sponsored gambling would be an America once again on the move — an America with broader and more sustainable economic growth, more honesty in government, more social trust, and the rekindling of the optimism that has long been our defining national strength.

That's a purpose worth sacrificing for.

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