

THE LOTTERY AND EDUCATION – HELP OR HARM

By Forrest Claunch

Lottery proposals are frequently attached to education and promoted as a benefit with exaggerated claims for revenues and complete silence on the true cost to education in general and our children in particular.

Wayne Blanton, executive director of the Florida School Boards Association, complained that the Florida lottery, which was supposed to supplement the state budget for schools, simply replaced existing revenue and made it difficult to pass local school board issues. “During the 10 years prior to the lottery, we passed 21 of 22 local bond issues (for school construction). After the lottery, we’ve only passed four of nine.”¹

The idea that lottery states spend more on education than states prohibiting lotteries is counter to the results of a study indicating 10% greater expenditure by non-lottery states. It is not uncommon for general funds for education to diminish as lottery funds are contributed, creating a flat revenue stream.² Close studies of spending on education and senior citizen programs suggest no increase due to the existence of lotteries.³

84% of Louisiana sixth-graders have gambled, according to study is the headline of a newspaper story that reports some of the results of a statewide study conducted by a team of psychiatry professors at LSU medical Center in Shreveport. Dr. James Westphal and assistant professors Lee Stevens and Jill Rush randomly surveyed 12,066 adolescents in public and private schools. The survey asked students in grades six through twelve about gambling and drug and alcohol use. Sixteen percent of the student’s demonstrated a significant prevalence for problem gambling behavior. 84 percent of sixth-graders and approximately 86 percent of the 12th graders said they had gambled. Scratch-off lottery tickets were identified as the most common form of gambling.⁴

When a state approves a lottery, it is by example teaching children that gambling is accepted public policy, and it produces greater opportunity for children to gamble.

Adolescents are gambling in startling numbers. According to the National Research Center, as reported in the National Gambling Impact Study Commission Report, “Adolescent gamblers are more likely than adults to become problem or pathological gamblers. NRC estimates that as many as 1.1 million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 are pathological gamblers, which is a much higher percentage than adults.”⁵ The report also states that, “In Massachusetts, 47% of seventh graders and three-fourths of high school seniors, reported playing the lottery.”⁶

Forrest Claunch is the Oklahoma District 101 Representative.

¹ Walters, Laurel Shaper, “Taking a chance on education,” Christian Science Monitor, (August 16, 1993), p. 9

² Peter Keating, “Lotto Fever: We All Lose,” Money Magazine (May 1996), p. 144

³ Executive Summary, The National Gambling Impact Study Commission, June 1999

⁴ Associated Press, Shreveport Times, July 13, 1997

⁵ National Gambling Impact Study Commission Report, June 1999, pp. 7-20

⁶ IBID