

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

TIME FOR A NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON THE GROWTH OF GAMBLING

HON. TIM ROEMER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 18, 1999

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, after two years of research and public hearings, the National Gambling Impact Study Commission has just completed its report and findings on the growth of gambling in America.

It is an eye-opening report which I hope every Federal, State, local and tribal government which sponsors gambling activities will take the time to read and consider.

At the same time, I hope this report will serve as the starting point for a national dialogue on gambling, so we can begin to make some informed decisions about gambling and its impact on people.

The NGISC made a number of major recommendations in its report. Perhaps most important of all, the commissioners unanimously recommended a "pause," or moratorium, on the growth of new gambling activities, to give governments further time to research and assess the impact of gambling on society.

Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinary recommendation. It reflects the genuine concern among the Commission members—many of whom work in the gambling industry itself—about the dangerous and unpredictable consequences of the explosive growth of gambling we have experienced in recent years.

Here are some of the Commission's other major findings:

(1) The Commission determined that unregulated growth of the gambling industry is seen as a "dangerous course of action";

(2) They determined that the more Americans are presented with opportunities to gamble, the more concern there is about problem and pathological gambling, and that the social, legal and financial consequences of gambling addiction are severe;

(3) They determined that technology is revolutionizing the gambling industry, and that the internet in particular poses serious legal, economic and social concerns which the nation is not prepared to deal with; and

(4) They concluded that many policy makers have been forced to make decisions about expanding gambling with virtually no credible studies to rely on and, at best, only an assessment of the perceived social impacts.

Mr. Speaker, it is not hard to find anecdotal evidence about the risks associated with gambling. In Indiana, a recent report by the Governor's Study Commission on Gambling showed that average losses among gamblers have increased by 20% in the three years since riverboat gambling was first introduced. Gambling losses now make up nearly one percent of what Indiana residents spend each year.

If National averages hold true, a disproportionate amount of these losses are coming from low-income households, the elderly and

young people—those Americans most vulnerable. Clearly, we need to be concerned about this growing problem.

Just this week, the Gallup Poll surveyed Americans' views about gambling. Among the major findings, 56% of adults believe that casinos have a negative impact on family and community life in the cities in which they operate. Another two-thirds of both the adults and teens surveyed believe that betting on sports events leads to cheating or fixing of games, while 57% of adults oppose legalized betting on sports events as a way to raise state revenue.

Overall, 76% of Americans surveyed expressed the view that gambling should either stay at current levels or be reduced or banned. Clearly, the vast majority of Americans support the Commission's call for a moratorium on new gambling activities.

The NGISC has made a number of positive recommendations in its report, including:

(1) That Congress authorize a general research strategy to build a knowledge of gambling behavior, including research on the social and economic impacts of gambling, and the impacts on crime and property values;

(2) That Governors and State legislatures fund objective studies on the prevalence of problem and pathological gamblers, and undertake research, education and treatment programs for problem gamblers;

(3) That enforceable advertising guidelines be adopted for the gambling industry, particularly as they relate to youths and low-income neighborhoods; and

(4) That a strategy be developed to prohibit internet gambling within the United States;

These are just a few of the major recommendations which the commission made.

In response to this report, Congressmen FRANK WOLF, JOHN LAFALCE and I have just introduced a resolution which encourages Federal, State, local and tribal governments to review the findings of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, and to consider the implementation of its recommendations.

The NGISC has delivered a powerful warning about the dangers of the unregulated growth of gambling. It is time now to build on this report, and develop a strategy to respond to the many concerns brought about by the rapid acceleration of gambling in our society.

LISTING MOUNTAIN PLOVER AS "THREATENED"

HON. BOB SCHAFFER

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 18, 1999

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, Colorado's farmers, ranchers, and water and property owners are under assault by the federal government. They face devastatingly low commodity prices, high equipment costs, onerous federal regulations and endangered species policy driven by Boulder-based, special-

interest environmental lawsuits. My response to the proposed listing of the mountain plover as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 is as follows.

After reviewing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) proposal to list the mountain plover as threatened, I adamantly oppose this listing because it is scientifically flawed, would devastate the eastern plains economy, fails to adequately consider reasonable alternatives, and contradicts other federal programs benefiting the plains environment.

First, the science used to support the listing is highly suspect and lacks the degree of certainty necessary to proceed with a comprehensive, intrusive and restrictive regulatory regime. The inadequacy of the cited population data is unacceptable. Throughout the listing, extrapolated estimates are relied upon for population numbers, which lays an insufficient scientific foundation. Even if the estimates referenced had a statistical basis, we are told, "The estimates of abundance provided for each state or area are usually from different researchers, from different times, and using different techniques. Therefore, the estimates should not be considered comparable to one another or necessarily additive." (64 FR 7591) Because the FWS population research methods were not compatible, the FWS relied upon dissimilar estimates. Federal regulations, especially those as pervasive as the ESA's, should never be based on approximations.

Furthermore, almost no population data from private lands is referenced. Since most of the land in the identified plover habitat range for Colorado is privately owned, and approximately 75 percent of all wildlife is found on private property, the total number of mountain plovers is certain to be significantly higher. The absence of private land surveys is also concerning because plovers prefer to nest on prairie dog colonies, at least 90 percent of which currently exist on private lands. It is beyond doubt a large number of additional plovers would be found if private land surveys were conducted. Clearly, the FWS does not have definitive evidence of the bird's actual numbers within Colorado, in other states, or as an aggregate across its range.

The FWS was involved in a similar situation with the swift fox. A federal ESA listing was proposed before comprehensive population surveys were completed, an effort abandoned after thorough surveys were conducted. The same situation could occur with the plover. The FWS must not proceed with this listing until an accurate, scientifically-based survey is conducted on both public and private lands through voluntary and confidential participation.

While the population questions are significant, there are other issues undermining the scientific basis of the listing. According to FWS biologists, drought threatens the plover. However, wet years also endanger the bird due to higher rates of grass growth. In fact, FWS biologists admit, "The long-term effect of such naturally occurring catastrophes on

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