

The Real Truth About Gaming in Alabama

By Chairman Buford L. Rolin, Poarch Band of Creek Indians

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We were disheartened to learn of Attorney General King's recommendation not to support our people.

Gaming is a primary economic enterprise for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. This business has provided our rural community with jobs – both for our tribal members and for our neighbors. It has allowed us to add to our community's tax base, and it has provided us opportunities to educate our children, build housing and medical clinics, and improve the lives of our elderly.

Our gaming business has also provided us with capital that we have used to start other businesses. Additionally, we have worked hard to be good neighbors by sharing our people and our financial resources in times of need. When Katrina hit last year, we were among the first to volunteer to help and were proud to give the Red Cross a \$95,000 donation. We feel strongly about our ability and our right to protect these projects that we rely upon to help feed, employ and educate our People and provide jobs and assistance to our neighbors.

We understand and respect those who have strong personal feelings about gaming. However, as citizens of this great state of Alabama, we expect to be treated fairly by those who both interpret and uphold the law. Unfortunately, the State's Attorney General's position against our business enterprises was neither fair to us nor to the citizens of this state who deserve honest judgments based on fact, not politically motivated messages designed to distract public attention from what is truly going on with regards to gaming in their state.

Gaming is expanding unabated in much of Alabama. You need to look no further than the billboards on the highway advertising sweepstakes parlors and poker, or the proliferation of video poker machines as evidence that unregulated gaming enterprises are growing like kudzu throughout the state. Those businesses are unregulated and they profit no one other than the owners.

Conversely, our gaming operations are regulated at a federal and tribal level. And ironically, we have repeatedly offered to share our revenues with the State (money that could go to education, for example) if

the Governor would agree to limit gaming. But the powers that be who claim to want to limit gaming will not even sit down at the table to talk with us.

None of us could imagine the State denying any other kind of business – a construction company or a manufacturer or a retailer – the right to expand while allowing their competition to do so. But that is exactly what is happening to us. It is bad business, but it is also bad policy.

Millions of dollars are being lost every year because the State will not agree to a compact with our Tribe that would limit gaming in Alabama while providing needed revenue for the state's coffers. Meanwhile, the video poker machines, bingo games, dog tracks, and sweepstakes parlors continue to creep over the landscape. These are enterprises that have never offered to pay the state a percentage of their profits and they never will. They are unregulated and apparently, unnoticed by our State's highest officials.

No matter what your stand is on gaming, it is clear there is an absolute lack of logic and fair play in the Attorney General's ruling and the Governor's refusal to truly limit gaming in a way that would benefit all of Alabama's citizens, not just the few who run unregulated gaming operations. Why is one business being valued and protected while another is being singled out and discriminated against? That is a question that should be posed to all of the citizens of this state.

Alabama should be known for treating all of its citizens and all of its businesses fairly. But sadly, the principle of fair play is not being represented in the highest levels of state government. The leadership of this state can and should do better.