

'No-brainer' casino, gambling bill would exploit Virginia's poor

Written by Administrator

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ANALYSIS/OPINION:

What used to happen only in [Las Vegas](#) didn't stay there.

Today, casino gambling, which defined the desert resort town, proliferates the country. Before 1990, only two states had legal land-based casino gambling. Now, fully 43 U.S. states have casinos, according to the American Casino Guide.

When you can sidle up to a game of blackjack everywhere from Boston (home of a sparkling Wynn casino as of last year) to the Agua Caliente Casino in Palm Springs, California, it's little wonder that Vegas has had to rely on increasingly desperate gimmicks to attract punters. Anyone up for a hologram Michael Jackson performance after we hit the buffet?

One of the last holdouts against casino gambling has been Virginia. But apparently not for long. This winter, the Southern state looks poised to legalize online sports betting and also permit casinos. The Democrats who control the state's House of Delegates are on board, and state Sen. Louise Lucas, Portsmouth Democrat, called introducing casino gambling to the commonwealth a "no-brainer." Gov. Ralph Northam appears keen to support casinos also.

Casinos have joined state lotteries as go-to sources of revenue for states that want to bilk their populations but that are too timid to simply raise taxes. Indeed, lotteries are a lightly disguised form of regressive taxation — and a deeply unethical exploitation of the poor.

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In 2018, Bankrate found that 28% of Americans who make less than \$30,000 a year bought lottery tickets at least once per week, each spending an average of \$412 a year on them. Perhaps needless to say, these are the Americans who can least afford to waste money on the lottery. And their own state governments are encouraging them to. It's downright perverse.

One need not be a blue-nosed church lady to recognize that casinos are similarly problematic. Indeed, casinos, despite their trappings of faux glamour and glitz, are gussied up lotteries — government-backed scams designed to raise “revenue.” But of course, in order for them to raise “revenue,” they have to succeed in separating punters from their money. The house has to win, in other words, and surprise, surprise, it always does. Casinos nationwide generate more than \$40 billion a year — largely by enticing participants to place losing bets.

Outside the United States, some countries are honest enough at what they're doing to rip off foreigners only. The more than a dozen casinos in South Korea, for instance, don't even let Koreans gamble in them. But in Virginia, the state's delegates appear eager to get their hands on their residents' wallets.

Moral concerns aside, Virginia's move to legalize casinos comes at a foolish time.

There's ample evidence that, with casinos now ensconced from coast to coast, the country is actually already overcasinoed and the extant casinos already appear to be cannibalizing each other.

The big daddies of tribal gambling, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun, both in Connecticut, reported gambling revenue declines last year. So too did casinos in [Las Vegas](#), as well as those in Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri, among others. That glistening new Boston casino is coming in at well below projected revenues, too.

Virginia's casinos would face immediate heavy competition, especially from the MGM Casino in Oxon Hill, Maryland, just across from the Potomac River from the tony suburb of Alexandria. Oh that MGM Casino, for all its trappings, reported revenue declines last year too.

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The meager gains the state of Virginia could hope to glean from casinos also come with ample costs associated with their presence; exhaustive research from scholars at the University of Maryland has found statistically significant increases in suicide, mental illness, violent crime and substance abuse in communities after they legalized gambling.

Casino gambling is absolutely a no-brainer — just not in the sense that Ms. Lucas meant it.

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