

Let's all get some "juice" from the gambling arenas
Across The Editor's Desk
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The idiocy of our public policy toward gambling in Alabama has always amazed me. We permit all types of gambling, either legally or by a wink and a nod, from which we do not derive a dime to either reduce the taxes we pay or, at a minimum, keep them from increasing.

Sports betting is a good example. We could probably cut our state income tax in half if we would legalize sports wagering and take the 10 percent "juice" instead of letting the illegal bookmakers make millions from those little orange squeezings.

We have dog racing in Alabama and each of the four race tracks pay state and local taxes on the pari-mutuel betting, but we have four locations at Atmore, Wetumpka, Montgomery and Shorter where millions of dollars are bet on bingo slots every week and we don't collect a plug nickel in local and state taxes.

Many of our political leaders and some past religious leaders have taken casino money from other states to fight the expansion of gambling in our state so as to protect gaming operations in those states. In other words they were helping the school children of some of our neighboring states at the expense of their own. It is ludicrous, and yes, it is also perfidious.

THE STATE LEGISLATURE IN THIS regular session has an opportunity give the taxpayers a chance to change this practice of self flagellation we have adopted and charge an adequate tax payment for the right to operate gaming facilities in limited locations throughout the state.

That's what House Bill 577, a proposed constitutional amendment already approved by a House committee would do. It would allow bingo gaming machines at the Mobile Greyhound Park and and The Birmingham Race Course. In return, the state would collect a 20 percent gross receipts tax on the money the racetracks bring in before expenses and maintenance costs are deducted. The Mobile Press-Register, in supporting the measure, says that under the assumption that each racetrack would install 5,000 gaming machines, that would generate \$255 million a year in gross revenues, the state would take in about \$51.7 million to put towards the Medicaid program. Those funds would then be matched by federal funding, so the added dollars for the program that provides health care to Alabama's low-income citizens would be about \$172 million a year, according to the Legislative Fiscal Office. With a projected \$200 million shortfall in the state's General Fund this year, it's clear that regular funding options are unavailable for shoring up the Medicaid program.

SO THE OPTION IS FOR the tax payers pony up more money or we let these two race tracks, where customers can bet any amount on dog and horse races worldwide, have a few bingo machines and save the taxpayers of Alabama millions.

An additional bonus is that Milton McGregor, who owns VictoryLand at Shorter and the Birmingham Race Course, has agreed to bring horse racing back to Birmingham if he can have the bingo machines. "That's the only way we could afford to bring in classy thoroughbred racing," McGregor says. Birmingham ought to be "chomping at the bit" for the economic boost this would provide the city."

The legislature should permit the people to vote on this public policy issue. That's what we're supposed to have the right to do in America.

A recent survey shows that a majority of state voters favor placing the amendment on the Nov. 4th ballot and 69 percent say they would approve it.

U. S. Attorney says there was no grandstanding and perjury probe against her
Alice Martin, the U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama writes with regard to my column two weeks ago: "You state that "law enforcement surrogates appeared at the State House" to try and enter the legislative chambers to serve subpoenas in the Post-Secondary Education Investigation. I am advised by the FBI-Birmingham Field Division that it coordinated with the FBI-Montgomery Resident Agent and worked through the Department of Public Safety to serve all subpoenaed individuals at the Department of Public Safety, away from the state house. There was no attempt to serve anyone on "...the floor of the legislative bodies" to "grandstand", as you write.

"I am not under investigation by the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) of the Department of Justice for perjury allegations made by a former employee. Investigations by the OPR and the Alabama State Bar both found no substance to the allegation some time ago. Those investigations are closed."