COMMENTS ON GAMBLING FOR PRESS CONFRENCE

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Since 1983, South Carolina Baptists have passed 20 resolutions against all forms of gambling. The national Southern Baptist Convention has consistently raised it’s collective voice by passing 12 resolutions condemning and opposing gambling. Based on our biblical convictions and Baptist tradition, we affirm that God’s intended design is for humanity to steward God’s resources, including money, in a manner that reflects the goodness of his provision. Central to a biblical argument against gambling is that it thrives on exploitation and preys on the vulnerable, namely the economically disadvantaged and those who are at risk of severe gambling addiction.

All people are made in the image of God and every person, regardless of age bears God’s image and possesses inherent dignity. Gambling dehumanizes individuals by exploiting the poor and vulnerable, turning them into victims of their desire for riches through chance and allowing casino owners and sports wagering companies who promise riches to profit off their losses. God’s image is further marred by reducing athletes to their monetary value based on the highs and lows of their performance. The NCAA states that one in three student-athletes have experienced harassment due to sport-betting. Turning people into commodities based on their athletic ability devalues their inherent dignity and robs them of the respect they deserve as image bearers of God.

Gambling addictions also increase the risk of self-harm and violent behavior. A study published in Frontiers in Psychology found that, in clinical populations and treatment services for problem gambling, between 22 and 81 percent of individuals had suicidal ideations, and between 7 and 30 percent had attempted suicide. In other reporting, approximately 40 percent of help-seekers have been identified as presenting a risk of suicide.”

Casino gambling proponents promise economic prosperity and point to the benefit to the government of significant additional tax revenue. But when casinos move from the planning stage to the community in reality, the costs outweigh the benefits. According to the economists at the National Association of Realtors the impact on neighboring property values is unambiguously negative. One of the project managers for a Wynn Casino said, “No one should look to casinos to revive cities, because that’s not what casinos do.” People who come to an area with a casino don’t pour money into the surrounding community because the all-absorbing environment of casinos is designed to keep people playing until their resources are exhausted. According to research provided by the Institute for American Values, people who live close to a casino are twice as likely to become problem gamblers as people who live more than 10 miles away. One Canadian study found that the 75 percent of casino customers who gamble most casually provide only 4 percent of casino revenues. A number of studies reviewed by IAV estimated that between 40 to 60 percent of casino revenues are earned from problem gamblers.

According to Romans 13:3-4 the responsibility of government is to promote what is good. Government also has a vested interest in ensuring that the mediating institutions upon which society rests are healthy and thriving. While the institution of family is the building block of society, and healthy families lead to healthy communities, gambling addiction accelerates the deterioration of the family unit through poor financial stewardship, abandonment, and inter-partner violence.

Promoting the good also includes the encouragement of healthy practices in society. Gambling addiction is a growing public health crisis in the United States, implicating concerns beyond issues of personal character and virtue. Just as the government has

the right and duty to oppose harmful and addictive practices like smoking, and immoral and destructive behaviors such as prostitution, it has the responsibility to

promote healthy lifestyles by opposing all of the various forms of s gambling.

I want to conclude with the story of Kavita Fisher, a 41-year-old mental health professional who struck it big in online gambling, winning close to $500,000. According to the Wall Street Journal, her windfall wiped out her six-figure online gambling losses, leaving her with money to spare. She left the money in the account and at the end of a single long day of constantly placing bets, she lost almost all the money. Nearly $500,000 gone in less than 24 hours.

Fisher, writes, “You know you’re wasting your life or time or money. You just can’t get out of it.” Fisher admitted that as her gambling debt increased, she drained her savings and retirement account and used her credit cards as a cash advance to fund her addiction. Her gambling debts have saddled her to years of crushing loan payments totaling $4,900 per month. She plugged herself in to a church sponsored 12-step program for people addicted to gambling. She is slowly dragging herself out of the deep hole created by her addiction. For Fisher, it will be a long and costly road to full recovery.

Finally, in a recent interview with WIS-TV, when asked about the gambling bills, Governor Henry McMaster said, “Gambling is bad for our culture. It’s not a part of our heritage, and there are better ways to make money, to give jobs, to generate tax money, to generate a thriving economy, than gambling.”

South Carolina Baptists agree. South Carolina can do better’ than putting South Carolinians’ financial and spiritual well-being at stake by opening our doors to more gambling.