



JEB BUSH
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

Office of the Governor

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February 17, 2005

Christian Coalition of South Florida
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Dear Friends:

Thank you for gathering this morning to discuss the serious implications of expanding gambling in our state.

Before I took office six years ago, Florida already allowed gambling, including casinos on Native American reservations, bingo, and cruises to nowhere. Since then, various measures to authorize new gambling activities or expand existing ones have come before the Legislature. I have consistently opposed efforts to expand or increase gambling in Florida because it has a negative impact on the social fabric and economic health of our state.

Proponents of casino gambling promise billions of dollars in new tax revenue for education. But these promises are speculative. A 1994 study on the likely effects of casino gambling conducted by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budgeting concluded that net costs to the state and its residents range between \$2.16 billion and \$3.25 billion. Other states found casino gambling caused the cannibalization of existing businesses and increased crime and unemployment rates. Increased gambling also requires a larger state bureaucracy to properly license and regulate the slot industry.

Gambling has significant social costs as well. While it is far more complicated to empirically measure these costs, they are no less real. According to a July 12, 2004 article from the Gainesville Sun, an increase in the popularity of poker, which is legal at pari-mutuel facilities in Florida, led to an increase in calls for help to Florida's Gamblers Anonymous. The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling notes that the social consequences of problem gambling include financial and legal difficulties, relationship and employment problems, and physical and emotional issues.

Now, South Florida voters are being asked to ignore both social and economic concerns and approve a massive expansion of gambling in their community. Yet details are elusive. How many machines would be authorized? What would the operating days and hours be? What kind of regulatory structure needs to be put in place? What about consumer protections? How will the state be able to trust the numbers provided by the casinos?



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Christian Coalition of South Florida
February 17, 2005
Page 2

And what we do know is not comforting. The only undeniable outcome of approval of casino-style gambling in South Florida is an industry-led drive toward Las Vegas-style casino development. If Florida legalizes Las Vegas-style slot machines, it will have a snowball effect. Federal law will require the state to enter into a compact with the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes, which collectively operate six casinos, for the same type of gambling. The current tribal operations are limited by law to bingo-style games -- so called Class II gaming -- and poker already permitted in the state's pari-mutuel facilities.

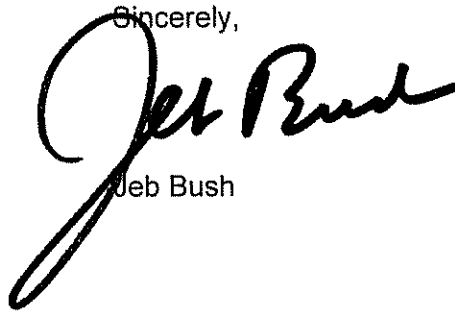
Under Federal law, revenue generated by the tribes' slots may never be taxed by the state. Thus we are likely to hear from the pari-mutuel industry that they need more slots, bigger casinos, and more locations to "compete" in the near future against the Native American tribes.

Amendment 4 is the veritable nose of the camel under the tent. The current referenda in Miami-Dade and Broward are not the last of the push to bring Las Vegas-style gambling to Florida.

Florida stands at the cusp. As a state we have limited gambling in our communities. However, the big casinos are seducing the voters with the hollow promise of more education funding. The true costs are significant and real: long-term decay of our traditional industries and the social fabric of our communities.

I am very encouraged that you are meeting this morning to focus on these important issues. Thank you for your concern for our state and its future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeb Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

Jeb Bush