



## Effects on Families and other Quality of Life Issues

Despite wild claims by gambling's opponents concerning vague but enormous social costs and economic dislocation, the removal of prohibitions on casino gambling has demonstrated across North America that regional economies and human psyches are not the fragile flowers that gaming's detractors make them out to be. We know convincingly that **virtually everyone has enough maturity, common sense, and/or discipline to behave responsibly in the presence of slot machines and casino table games.** And we know convincingly that **economies adjust and grow in response to the introduction of casinos,** much as they adjust and grow in response to the introduction of any new outlet for consumer spending.

### Effects on Families

In this political environment we hear a lot of talk about "family values." Let's examine the effects casino gambling on the families of customers, and the families of employees.

**Gaming customers view casinos as an entertainment option,** not as either a career, an alternative to work, an investment strategy, a get-rich-quick scheme, or a way of life. And they behave accordingly: they budget the amounts of time and money that they plan to spend, and they stick to those budgets. According to the annual Yankelovich Monitor, casino customers are significantly more likely than non-customers to agree with the statement, "Doing enjoyable things and going interesting places means more to me than having a lot of prized possessions."

A casino is simply a venue for a fun night out with one's friends. A night of gaming is no more anti-family than an evening at the theater, a supper club, or a college football weekend. While having a fair shot to win is important, the excitement, social interaction, and participation are more central to a satisfying casino experience.

The "gambling is anti-family" rhetoric is most obviously empty when one examines the effects of casino gambling on the local workforce. The casino industry creates thousands of private sector jobs without any tax breaks, subsidies, or other government largess. The casino industry trains the unemployed and puts them to work. The casino industry takes welfare recipients off public assistance. The casino industry empowers individuals and their families. In short, **the industry creates significant numbers of private-sector, career-path jobs which are the "glue" that promotes strong, stable families.**

In jurisdiction after jurisdiction, **social services costs remain stable or decrease after new gaming facilities become operational.** Research conducted for the NGISC concluded that places with increased access to casino gambling experienced significant decreases in the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed, as well as marked decreases in welfare spending, unemployment insurance spending, and other government transfer payments.<sup>1</sup>

The dynamic at work across the country is clear: additional employment opportunities translate to lower public outlays for welfare and unemployment benefits. The casino industry

is highly labor-intensive, with a track record of providing career-path jobs to minority members, the underemployed, and the unemployed, without any expenditure of public funds.<sup>2</sup>

### **Other Quality of Life Concerns**

It's true that removing prohibitions on casino gambling can affect the quality of life in a community, much like any new shopping mall, convention center, or major tourist attraction can affect a community. To some extent, the "growing pains" that communities experience as a cost of virtually all forms of economic development – such as increased levels of automobile traffic, stress on local sewer systems and other aspects of a community's physical infrastructure, increased demand for housing, increased numbers of children attending public schools, and increased consumption of natural resources -- may accompany the development of casinos.

A report for the Greater Baltimore Committee, the city's leading business group, concluded that "Existing data from U.S. communities such as St. Louis, where gaming exists but where casinos are not the dominant industry, show that **casinos are not likely to have a substantial impact on crime and other social problems.**"<sup>3</sup> And a series of interviews with 128 community leaders in gaming home communities (part of a National Institute of Justice research project) concluded that **a clear majority of those leaders favored the introduction of casino gambling in their communities, believed that casino gambling has enhanced the quality of life in their communities, and believed that the economies of the communities have been positively affected.**<sup>4</sup>

What's the overall lesson? Don't believe the anti-gambling crowd's hype and fear-mongering. Clearly, any costs associated with casino gambling are very modest, particularly in light of such benefits as increased tourism, increased "voluntary" tax revenue, increased capital investment (which, in turn, adds to the property tax rolls), increased employment opportunities, and increased consumer freedom and choice.

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<sup>1</sup> National Opinion Research Center, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Coopers and Lybrand, *Gaming Industry Employee Impact Survey*, October 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Reuter, *The Impact of Casinos on Crime and other Social Problems: An Analysis of Recent Experiences*, report prepared for the Greater Baltimore Committee, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> David Giacomassi et al., "Attitudes of Community Leaders in New Casino Jurisdictions Regarding Casino Gambling's Effects on Crime and Quality of Life," paper presented at the Southern Criminal Justice Association Annual Meeting, October 1998.