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OPINION

Letters to the Editor

Gambling Preys on Human Frailties

Growing addictions bring state profits and pain



BY WILLIAM A. COLLINS

The gambling industry's under-the-radar political heft got a shot of overdue publicity when Sheldon Adelson, its biggest mogul, tried to use casino profits to buy the U.S. presidency last year. Fortunately, the candidates the quirky conservative promoted were so flawed they lost.

But today's big gamblers aren't losing all their bets. Like the mob, the government authorities that run lotteries have learned to capitalize on human frailty — even if they use the profits to substitute for taxes. About a quarter of the \$65 billion we spend each year on lottery tickets land in state coffers.

Unfortunately the frailty itself mostly goes untended. Funds to treat gambling addiction remain thin, whether their beneficiaries are taxpayers, gaming moguls, or tribes. No one wants to dilute profits by squandering cash on saving the poor souls who make the whole system

work. After all, any successful treatment program would reduce the number of customers.

The states are the worst villains of all. Rather than treating the growing addiction to gambling, they prey on it. State lotteries proliferate like flora in the rainforest, guided by advertising to target lower-income citizens. Revenue departments act like the numbers runners of old, while shame in legislatures remains in very short supply.

At least the mob has been cut out of the deal. After all, profits from lottery addicts do go to the public treasury and the body count has been zeroed out. This is more than can be said for the drug war, where addicts are still jailed, the mob rakes in the booty, and the death toll persists unabated.

Also, gambling is now debated openly. Pros and cons are argued freely and passionately in legislative assemblies, whereas drugs can only be discussed guardedly — well, except in the states of Colorado and Washington.

This openness about gambling is a big improvement and occasionally leads to moderately intelligent decisions about the nature of legal wagering. Still, despite best efforts and hopeful fantasies, it can never replace taxes. Even after a steady climb, the states get \$16 billion a year from lottery tickets sales. That's

only 2 or 3 percent of their total budgets.

And now a new threat has cropped up — Internet gambling. Computer poker is already popular, and many states are contemplating opening the barn door to all games, thereby making it easier to fleece the gambling public. Casinos at least require that you physically get there before you lose your shirt.

The Internet allows the poorest and least mobile the chance to do that right at home. Nevada and Delaware have already legalized it but the concept isn't spreading at full tilt yet. While New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie just vetoed an Internet gambling bill for the second time since 2011, he's expressed a willingness to reconsider if lawmakers come up with a plan that calls for a bigger revenue stream for the Garden State.

Gambling, like drugs and alcohol, is a worldwide addiction. Its sufferers abound everywhere. Thus, governments may be evaluated based on how intelligently they manage both the profits and the pain from these afflictions. Unfortunately, we're stumbling awfully close to that Internet precipice.

OtherWords columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Conn.

First Black Quarterback

I read the obituary for Bob Reynolds (Portland Observer, Feb. 13 issue). Reynolds was an outstanding all-around athlete at Jefferson High School and the University of Oregon as the article pointed out, but he was not the first black quarterback at Oregon.

The first black quarterback at the University of Oregon was Bobby Robinson who was also a Jefferson high graduate and played quarterback for Oregon during his first varsity season in 1927.

You can read more about Bobby Robinson on my website at oregonstars.com under the biographies section. Several years ago I did a documentary with the University of Oregon about Bobby Robinson entitled, "Forgotten Ducks: the story of Charles Williams and Bobby Robinson."

The Portland Observer is one of my favorite newspapers. Keep up the good work.

Herman L. Bram, Portland

Honoring Rosa Parks

I would like to thank President Obama, the Post Master General, and all others involved in playing a part in the Feb. 4 issuance of a U.S. Postage stamp in honor of Rosa Parks.

In 2006, following her death, and the 50th anniversary of her arrest in Montgomery, Ala. for refusing to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus, I petitioned the Post Master, President George W. Bush, and other elected officials, to honor Parks by placing her picture on a new stamp.

The actions of Rosa Parks were legendary and changed the course of human history. We need to be thankful for her fight for freedom and honor her every day.

*Rev. Willie Banks
Portland*

Hearing the Cry for Immigration Reform

Laying out a pathway for justice

BY MARI CASTELLANOS

President Obama has just released his administration's blueprint for immigration reform. It is notable that this is one of the first



of his second term in office.

Though some may ascribe political motivation, the President is laying out a pathway for justice, a way for those who have lived in the shadows to come out into the light. This is not just politics; this is doing what is right.

The United States is a multi-racial, multi-cultural country. The strength of the nation comes from diversity and unity. We who are many, who come from many cultures, choose to be one people, devoted to shared principles and committed to the wellbeing of all.

For over a decade, lawmakers and citizens alike have recognized the presence among us of new-

comers from many lands, who have journeyed, like so many before them, fleeing wars and poverty, and seeking work and safety.

Men and women cross barren deserts on foot under cover of darkness. As we increased surveillance in areas close to towns, the pilgrims ventured farther into the desert where many lose their lives. We erected three layers of wall, crowned by barbed wire.

Still the migrants came. They fled poverty and violence. Many perished trying. Those who made it across told horrible stories of wars and violence, as Mexican law enforcement battled the drug traffic.

Many businesses were happy to welcome these new laborers. From farms to meatpacking plants, to restaurant kitchens, they were welcomed and often paid less than

minimum wage.

Almost all work at least two jobs to make ends meet. They are human shadows silently walking in the light of dawn and in the moonlight. All fear "la migra," the Immigration and Naturalization Service police who raid factories, taking away those lacking proper papers and sometimes leaving behind terrified children, who don't know where their parents are.

During hard times, even tender-hearted people can get tough. Perhaps the economic downturn of the past few years fueled it. Immigrants through many states suddenly had to fear, not only "la migra," but law enforcement agents from states and municipalities who had passed their own immigration laws. In at least one infamous case, they had to endure terrible hardship and humiliation. Immigrants fled once more.

The Latino community mobilized, and leaders denounced the inhu-

man conditions of the INS detention centers and other facilities where the undocumented were held. Religious leaders of all faiths condemned the treatment of immigrants.

President Obama seems to have heard the cry of the poor, the undocumented immigrant women, men and children who want to remain a family, an American family. The President has introduced his plan for immigration reform. A bi-partisan group of senators have produced a plan as well.

In the Nation's Capital, where Ethiopian and Salvadoran faces abound, where people from the entire world visit to behold the experience that is America, the President and the Congress must find a way to incorporate the undocumented to the American story, a story of resilience and perseverance, a story of freedom and grace.

Mari Castellanos is a policy advocate for domestic issues for the United Church of Christ.

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