

A good season record, but the battle rages on!

The past decade of fighting the expansion of legalized gambling has taught us that the disease it causes is truly a hidden addiction, and that it is random in its victimization. This vice destroys lives in every class, every race and every group that has members who try gambling. It claims husbands, wives, grandmothers, accountants, professors, children, and more, including some of the most trusted citizens of our society.

Such is the case of David Williams, as told by Indiana attorney David Noffsinger during the September NCAIG conference in Baltimore, MD.

Williams, explained the attorney, was an auditor for the State of Indiana. He was a model citizen, so frugal and conservative that he clipped coupons to buy tooth paste. His home mortgage was paid off, and he had a net worth of about \$175,000, which he had accomplished on an annual salary of \$42,000. Then came an advertisement with a “free” \$20 gift card to the new Aztar riverboat casino. David went to the riverboat, and lost his free \$20. But he soon returned, and lost \$800 of his own money. “It was downhill from there,” Noffsinger said.

It takes longer for most people to become addicted. One might have to wait three or four years for trouble to arise, but David’s anguish came up quickly.

In March of 1997, Noffsinger related, David lost more than his entire year’s wages. His girlfriend was worried, and told Aztar what they were doing to her friend. In March of 1998, he lost \$44,000 in two days. Armed with a suicide note he had written, David’s girlfriend had him committed for psychiatric treatment, and sent Aztar a certified letter including his financial records and the suicide note as proof of what they were doing to this good man.

While David was “locked up,” the casino “banned” him until he could prove he was well enough to gamble again. But within a year, he was back on the mailing list, using his “fun card” and deepening his addiction, until he lost everything, including his home.

Noffsinger said David Williams stands apart from other cases where addicts have sued casinos. This time, there is absolute proof the casino knew what they were doing, and to whom.

They always know, Noffsinger said. They keep track of everything their

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100 Maryland Avenue NE,
Room 311, Washington, DC, 20002

800-664-2680 • www.ncaig.org

**As the year closes, there have been 43 battles
for the expansion of gambling in 27 states.
Our side has won 40 and lost three.
Only Pennsylvania remains to be decided**

customers do, how long they stay, at what machines, and how much they lose. It's part of their marketing plan. They took everything David Williams owned, including his self control. They created an addict. They knew it. They banked on it.

Entertainment? For some, yes, but gambling is not like "shopping or the movies." It is a deadly roulette that is damaging, destroying and even killing Americans every day. The damage is part of the plan. It's what provides the profit.

Casinos claim they don't know who the problem gamblers are. "I find that a little hard to believe," boomed self-proclaimed casino victim Bill Kearney, another conference speaker and admitted victim of gambling addiction. "They know everything from the color of your eyes to your shoe size."

Kearney, a self-made Philadelphia millionaire by the time he was 30, found himself addicted to the first wave of casino gambling in nearby Atlantic City. Within a year, he was beginning the "chase," trying to recapture what he had lost. Kearney continued gambling two more years until he had lost everything, including his business, his two homes and his family.

The street-savvy Kearney still can't imagine why he fell for the "con" of the gaming industry. But he does know how it happened. He fell for the "comps" and gifts that made him feel welcome and important. He liked the "celebrity" treatment.

The industry kept track of Kearney just like they kept track of David Williams, and they used every target marketing trick they could to keep him coming until he was ruined. Kearney's book, *Comped* is compelling reading, and so is the list of "Seven Cards," he would like to deal to the gambling industry. They are:

- 1 - No Comps.** Kearney contends "slot dollars" and free buffets lure seniors just like free limos and penthouse suites lure the "high rollers," contributing to the "high" that generates addiction.
- 2 - No Credit.** Casinos often offer "markers," that let cash-strapped players keep on losing. Markers are essentially loans for which casinos routinely offer payment plans, and they are often interest free. Worse, unpaid Nevada markers are handled as criminal violations and citizens have been deported across the nation to face jail time for not paying them. Imagine if credit card companies and banks had that kind of leverage!
- 3 - No Casino Chips.** If players had to lay out real cash, attitudes might be different.
- 4 - No 24/7.** Most gambling jurisdictions open with restricted hours to give compulsive gamblers time to step back from the tables and slots. After months or a few years of operations, the casinos plead poverty and usually win. They promise higher revenues if the typical 4-7 a.m. closures are dropped. "If you want to see

pathological gambling in full bloom, take a stroll through the casinos during those extra hours,” Kearney said.

5 - No alcoholic beverages on the casino floor. “This is a no-brainer. Can you imagine how many lawsuits there would be if other financial institutions, like your bank, insurance or stockbroker, served free liquor while doing business?” People who are making potentially life-changing financial decisions should not be encouraged to be impaired.

6 - No ATM Machines! Kearney joins a host of addiction experts who insist that moving the source of money far enough away for losers to think and “cool down” would be a big help to gamblers gone wild. But it would also diminish casino profits.

7 - Monthly Statements. “The gaming industry says that they work very hard to prevent their customers from getting in over their heads, but unfortunately, they claim, there’s no way of them knowing if a customer has a gambling problem.”

But that can’t be true! “The casinos give their customers those plastic cards . . . With the use of these cards the casino can track the time and the amount of money gambled. This information is calculated, and this is how they determine the value of the Comps that will be given to their customers. It’s a very efficient tracking system. So what I am suggesting is that the casinos and racinos mail out a monthly statement. This statement will show the amount of money and time spent gambling, and the value of the “comps” received. This way, those people who just might be compulsive, will be able to see what this entertainment costs.”

Conference delegates roared as Kearney suggested spouses should have access to the statements as well!

Kearney’s “seven cards” may be something of a dream, but the story of Sue Abrams was a real nightmare - and she doesn’t gamble!

Mrs. Abrams is the Seneca tribal council member beaten by pro-gambling thugs -- pals of the power brokers who swindled the northern New York tribe into sanctioning a casino on her reservation. Her neck was broken. Her family members were threatened, her house shot at -- all because she was, and is, a strident opponent of gambling in “Indian Country.”

Her story is touching, frightening and revealing. It’s an account that brings reality to the mystery of how and why gambling is “poisoning” Native American cultures across the nation – for the profit of non-Native financiers and gambling industry executives.

**Governor Ed Rendell says
he wants slot machines approved this year as a
Christmas present for the people of Pennsylvania.
We’re calling his ploy
“The gift that keeps on taking.”**

It's a compelling story of how an unscrupulous tribal member joined forces with "a slick attorney" and Malaysian financier to swing an election. (Abrams and her group had defeated gambling in two earlier elections.) Money and the lure of big profits made the difference. Tribal members were paid for votes. Off-reservation members were flown across the country and paid to vote. Promises of prosperity and future employment lured some.

Now, only about 75 of the tribe's people are among the more than 2000 casino employees at the Niagra facility, and no one is allowed to see the books that might explain where the money goes. A few people are getting rich, while some Seneca families still live without indoor plumbing and with 13 people crammed into a mobile home. Unemployment remains near 60 percent.

The financier gets 30 percent. New York gets 25, and the machine manufacturers get 40, but no one knows where the last few percentage points are going – at least no one who can be forced to be accountable in the "sovereign nation" of the Seneca tribe. Not even the non-Indian entities are required to give an accounting. The casino was built and is still in operation without an approved state compact or approval from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "The Great White Father didn't do his job again," Mrs. Abrams charges.

Abrams urges Congress to repeal the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Gambling turns the tribes into "banana republics," with third world economics and accountability, she said. "When Congress approved gaming for Indians across the country, it created a tool that destroys us."

There is no money coming to the people, Mrs. Abrams told the conference, but more importantly, "What congress is doing is destroying a culture -- the first people of this land," she said. "I think there is a better way of life. We need to teach our children there are values and morals and principles to live by, and that a quality of life is more important than making a buck off of a person who has an illness."

How could anyone have said it better?

So the fight continues across the nation, across Indian Country, in the families devastated by addiction and in the despair of the newly homeless. But Susan Abrams shows us all what courage can bring. She told the NCALG crowd, "There is a greater power at hand that I rely on. Even though it is a David and Goliath fight, I know we can win."

At this critical point in the fight against legalized gambling, we ask you to help. Please make a generous contribution.

Spreading the truth takes money. Sue Abrams and her coalition won the first two elections on her reservation with funding from bake sales, before big casino money came to town.

Education is the key to stopping that kind of bullying, but it takes more than bake sales. Please join the fight and let's continue our winning ways!

Tom Grey

Executive Director,
National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling