



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Response to "Video Poker? Not Here." (December 14, 2009)

Your editorial "congratulating" the Illinois communities who've thus far opted-out of the opportunity to allow video poker is alarmingly moralistic if not altogether disingenuous for its blatant pandering to the stereotypical politicization of this fully legitimate small-business industry. Every community that has thus far rushed to judgment on video poker has done so without the benefit of a true and comprehensive public dialogue about the realities of video gaming in community bars and restaurants.

For example, would most of your readers be surprised to know that in Louisiana, that state upon which Illinois' law was most closely modeled, crime in *every* category has gone down *every* year (except a one-year aberration following Hurricane Katrina) since the legalization of local video gaming in 1992? South Dakota and Montana, each with similar laws, have also benefited from consistent and significant crime reduction over the last 20 and 25 years respectively. And these reductions are directly supported by the tax revenue generated from video gaming as such revenue may support local police departments and thusly serves to benefit the entire community. Additionally video gaming at bars and restaurants benefit small businesses (a class of business the *Tribune* has long supported as vital to overall economic prosperity) by generating bottom-line income which is most often reinvested into those businesses as capital improvements and increased employment opportunities.

However, what is most alarming is the paper's position that "moderate-income people" are somehow not fit to make decisions about where and when to spend their own leisure money, and that any community (there are still over 1,000 in Illinois) that would prefer to let the free market determine the viability of video gaming is somehow a "loser." It is certainly worth noting that the vast majority of communities opting-out of video poker are located north of I-80, which in the paper's judgment must mean that these "savvy and educated citizens" also bear some special democratic authority over their fellow southern taxpayers.

Full disclosure: my business is one that seeks to benefit from video gaming, by providing the financing necessary to the small businesses that hope to grow within this emerging industry. But there is no bias to these facts which any intrepid and principled *Tribune* reporter can look up. The truth is this: video gaming at bars is a competitive amenity just like satellite TV. It is not a 'get-rich-quick' gimmick to "lure" in business. Over 86% of American adults have gambled at some time in their lives and 60% (roughly the same as who consume alcohol: 61%) do so on an annual basis. And yet only 1% of adults have pathological gambling problems (as compared to 8% who are alcoholics). Every community deserves the right to say 'no thank you' to video gaming (the General Assembly is not forcing them to have it, only giving them the opportunity to allow it). But I would hope, as one of your readers, that the *Tribune* would recommend they do so based on the facts, not fear mongering and insults.

Ed Colomb
President
The Funding Stop

Source information: Louisiana, South Dakota and Montana Law Enforcement Agency Uniform Crime Reports; National Council on Problem Gambling; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism