

Why Colorado Considers Casinos More 'Essential' Than Churches

Right now, in Cripple Creek (the "Las Vegas of Colorado"), located in Teller County, people can sit side by side at any number of slot machines and gamble 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is no social distancing or sanitizing the gambling machines that are touched frequently by everyone.

Instead, players sit in close contact as they gamble, touching the same slot levers and buttons that many others have touched, and often just moments before, with no sanitation. And by all accounts, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis' COVID-19 limit of 175 persons is being overlooked when it comes to these tax revenue moneymakers.

In other words, casinos are "essential" because they bring in so much money in tax revenue.

But the very same county officials who have turned a blind eye to the casinos' non-socially distanced rooms, unsanitized equipment and violations of the 175-person limit are attempting to shut down AWWMI's Fall Ministers' Conference, which began the evening of Monday, Oct. 5.

Last week, Liberty Counsel filed a request for an "emergency injunction pending appeal" with the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. The filing requested the court prevent Colorado Gov. Jared Polis from taking any further action against Andrew Wommack Ministries International (AWMI), as we wait for the courts to review the full merits of our case.

Ministers from around the country were still arriving at AWWMI's large campus Monday evening when word was received: The court declined to issue an emergency injunction pending the

appeal. But the case is far from over. It is still on a fast track. We will not allow Gov. Polis and local officials to carve the First Amendment out of the Constitution.

The fact is, the AWMi/Charis Bible College campus is safer and cleaner than the casinos Gov. Polis prefers. The ministry has instituted cleaning protocols far and above the state's recommendations, including sanitization between gatherings of people, temperature checks and much more. The casinos do not even come close.

On the campus, people practice social distancing, but not in the casinos. In casinos, people touch the same gambling machines everyone else touches.

Perhaps the double standard arises from the fact that the 12 casinos operating in Teller County, in which Cripple Creek is located, generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax revenues *per month*, and AWMi does not. However, unlike the casinos, AWMi has a constitutional right to exist and operate without government interference.

Casinos do not have a First Amendment constitutional right to exist and operate, whereas churches and ministries do. Our First Amendment makes it absolutely clear that no government entity may create a church, nor may the state tell people how to worship.

The Supreme Court in 1947 ruled in *Everson v. Board of Education* that no government official may keep people away from church against their will.

In restricting the number of people in AWMi's over 3,100-seat, socially distanced and properly sanitized sanctuary, while allowing innumerable people to congregate next to each other in casinos and share unsanitized equipment with untold numbers of others. Gov. Polis has proven his restrictions have *nothing* to do with health and safety and everything to do with tax revenues.

The ministers' conference is ongoing despite the Colorado government's threats. To be threatened with criminal charges and fines is a serious matter. I believe we will win this battle, but it may take longer than we hoped. In the meantime, I want to ask for your prayers and support.

As I said earlier, this case is far from over. Despite the lack of an emergency injunction, our appeal on behalf of AWMi remains pending, and we look forward to presenting a full argument before the court soon. Gov. Polis' discriminatory treatment of Christians is illegal and unconstitutional. I will keep you updated as the case progresses.

We now have church cases pending in six different federal courts of appeal. These are California, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine and Virginia.

This week, we will file a petition with the Supreme Court on behalf of our Romanian churches in Illinois. More about that later.

I pray frequently for the pastors we represent. At the dawn of each day, they could be charged criminally for worship or assessed fines. To hold any worship in much of California, including one's private home or apartment, is a criminal offense punishable by up to one year in prison.

The church has been essential for 2,000 years, and now it is more essential than ever. {eoa}

For the original article, visit .