

The Biggest Setback to Gambling in Florida in 100 Years

This week Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed a law banning Internet cafe storefront casinos that will have the effect of shutting down 1,000 mainly strip mall locations producing approximately \$1 billion in revenue. It has been called the biggest decrease in gambling in 100 years in this state.

My friend, Scott Plakon, was the first to file legislation in 2011 when he was a member of the Florida House of Representatives, to clarify the law and to address this problem. In the beginning, he was a lone voice in the wilderness calling attention to this problem. I'm so proud of him that I wanted to feature him in this Strang Report and to give you background not included in our recent news story, which you can read [here](#).

Scott is a principled Christian. He's an example of someone who has radically changed his world—which you may know is our mission statement. And while I can't take any credit for what he did, he is an example to others of what one man can do. He, at the beginning and against all odds, took on a \$1 billion industry that was targeting the poor and elderly in our state ... and succeeded.

I'm personally concerned about the huge growth of gambling in this country. At one time, Christians opposed it as much as we'd oppose same-sex marriage or abortion now. However, not much is said from America's pulpits about the lives that are shattered by gambling.

Scott heard about Internet cafes when one moved in next to where he got his hair cut. As he researched it, he was horrified to see how many people lost all their money, and

sometimes their marriages, due to gambling addictions. And while people can gamble by going to Las Vegas or on cruise lines, these were worse because they were so convenient in 1,000 locations in Florida. In one memorable speech on the House Floor, there was a gasp in the room as Scott called these “the crack cocaine of gambling” ... because they were.

There’s one in Lake Mary two miles from my office behind a favorite barbecue restaurant. I visited it once with Scott when he was telling me about how he was working to close them down. He also took me to another larger location next to Tuesday Morning, where my wife shops. A few months ago, it was robbed and there was a death involved while patrons were using the slot machines on the computers. These had become a magnet for crime in our community and around the state.

Gambling is illegal in Florida with a few exceptions such as parimutuel betting in certain counties and, more recently, the Florida Lottery. Someone told me there is a greater chance of being killed by lightning in Florida than winning the Florida Lottery jackpot. So why doesn’t anyone think they will be struck by lightning, but everyone who plays the lottery thinks they will win?

Scott believed that the so-called “Internet cafes” were illegal even though the owners thought it was a loophole. However, the sheriffs in several counties, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the IRS and the Secret Service decided they were illegal and made 57 arrests in what they called “phase one.” Florida’s Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll resigned over this because her public relations firm had represented them in the past.

[Click here](#) to see a TV news story that credited Scott when the bill was passed.

This story has been ongoing for a quite some time. Scott wrote an op-ed for the local newspaper that you can read [here](#).

Also, Businessweek Magazine gave a good overall view of problem in this article.

And while I'm giving links for those who want to know more, here is the news story a few weeks ago on the day of the 57 arrests.

Scott was warned from the beginning that he couldn't take on these storefront casinos ... they were too powerful and had too much money. Yet against all odds, he did. I'm proud of my friend.

Other states are also struggling with these storefront casinos.

Do you agree this was best for the citizens of Florida and should other state legislatures and governors take similar action?

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