

Arkansas, The Predator State

By Jerry Cox

For year's we've proudly called ourselves "the natural state." But on Election Day, Arkansas voters may turn our "natural state" into the "predator state." The great American humorist, Will Rogers, once said, "If you ever injected truth into politics you'd have no politics." Well, it's time we injected a shot of truth into this whole Arkansas lottery debate.

Supporters of Arkansas' proposed state-run lotteries amendment haven't pointed out that this constitutional amendment would put our state government in the gambling business. They've lost sight of the fact that our government is based on the inspiring design that government is the servant of the people, rather than their master. The truth is, this constitutional amendment would turn our state government into a predator that would entice its own citizens to gamble and lose as much money as possible on state-run lotteries.

Do we really believe our own state government should, or could, run a multi-million dollar state-wide gambling operation? Wouldn't we rather see our state government put more effort into improving our schools and building good roads than going into the gambling business? This alone should be reason enough to oppose the state-run lotteries amendment, but if that's not enough, how about a healthy injection of truth?

If we think these state-run lotteries are going to be off in some other neighborhood or town, we need think again. Iowa, a state roughly the size of Arkansas, has over 2,600 lottery outlets state-wide. Three thousand Arkansas convenience stores have endorsed the Arkansas lotteries amendment. Looking at those numbers, an Arkansas lottery would bring gambling to cities, towns and neighborhoods everywhere. By the time the courts and the legislature get through twisting and expanding the definition of lotteries, we can expect miniature casinos to pop up in empty storefronts with rows of instant win or lose lottery video machines. In Kansas, state-run casinos will open in four locations next year. Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, and Florida are just a few other states where the issue of state-owned and operated casinos is on the table. Since the term "lotteries" is not defined, this Amendment leaves the casino door wide open. Imagine Arkansas with state-run casinos in counties where they don't even allow the sale of alcohol! Do we really want government-run gambling on Main Street?

Lotteries exist for the sole purpose of tricking people into gambling and losing as much money as possible. Even though a fool and his money are soon parted, should the state do this to its own people? Imagine turning on your TV day after day and seeing the same old deceptive state advertising that entices your friends and family to bet and lose as much money as possible on the Arkansas lottery. If this amendment passes, it's only going to get worse. As the novelty wears off, states always have to do more advertising and invent more lotteries to keep people interested in gambling away their money. In 2003, Tennessee started with one lottery; now they have five different state-run lotteries. By the way, that's why this amendment authorizes state "lotteries"—plural. The state of Arkansas has shut down hundreds of predatory payday lenders. If this amendment passes, those crooked lending agencies deserve an apology from a state government that will be chief among predators.

Raise your hand, if you believe we need to increase the size of our state government. Everyone knows if Arkansas goes into the gambling business, that's exactly what will happen. There will be a lottery director, lottery offices, and lottery bureaucrats who sit in those offices. There will be lottery salesmen who travel the state, selling local businesses on being lottery outlets. If we're lucky, there will be lottery "police" who try to keep the whole operation from sinking into the sewer of waste and corruption—but don't count on it.

What do you get when you mix gamblers, politicians, and a pile of money? While this sounds like an opening line for a joke, there's nothing funny about the political corruption a lottery will bring to Arkansas. Gambling and government don't mix, or maybe they mix too well. Imagine the lobbying influence multi-million-dollar lottery management companies will bring to the halls and backrooms of our state government.

GTECH, an Italian-owned company with headquarters in West Greenwich, RI., is the world's leading supplier of lottery technology and services. They run 86 lottery systems in 48 countries and 26 American states. GTECH has a history of scandals spanning several years. For example, J. David Smith, GTECH's national sales director, went to prison for taking almost \$170,000 in kickbacks from lobbyists in New Jersey. A Texas probe of GTECH revealed ties between GTECH and State Lottery Commissioner Nora Linares, and she was fired. Also, in Texas GTECH hired former Texas Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes as a lobbyist. GTECH later bought out his contract for \$23 million.

Who would naively believe Arkansas can avoid these corrupting influences? Once a state government yolks itself to lotteries, they never break free. Outside lobbying influences from lottery management companies take over at the legislative level, passing laws that secure their financial profits. With these they fatten the coffers of state politicians, and buy friends and more influence. In the meantime, state lottery dollars become just another form of taxation that state government thinks it simply cannot live without. If Arkansas' voters pass this lotteries amendment, we will be stuck with it for the rest of our lives.

Texas may be "like a whole other country;" Missouri may be the "show me state;" and Louisiana may be "the sportsman's paradise;" But we're "the natural state," and we don't want to follow their example of state-run, predatory gambling, political corruption, and false hope. It simply isn't worth it. We've managed quite well without state run-lotteries. On November 4, a vote against state run lotteries will keep the predators out and keep Arkansas "the natural state."

Jerry Cox is president of Family Council Action Committee in Little Rock, Arkansas