

**Canada's Gambling Watch Network's e-mailed Newsletter**

Volume 8 – January 11, 2007 – Issue 012 DRAFT

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## Editorial

'We wish Surrey all the best in 2007 in its fight against crime', an interesting article in the 1/2 Vancouver Province, reports that B.C.'s second largest city will work with a crime-reduction strategy which has been a big success in Britain. Under this strategy, the paper writes, the root causes of crime -- such as drug addiction, poverty or mental illness -- are tackled just as vigorously as the prevention or punishment of the crimes themselves.

I do also wish Surrey's leaders great success in its efforts, but it strikes me that addiction to gambling is not mentioned here, despite the fact that Surrey has a racetrack/casino that has no less than 420 Slot Machines a.k.a. the crack cocaine of gambling. It's not long ago that newspapers in that area reported that the RCMP believed Richmond's casino caused a large increase in all sorts of crime there.

May I suggest that removing those highly addictive gambling devices would be the first logical step in making the battle against crime more effective?

Johannes DeViet.

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## General

'Ottawa to let reserves bypass smoking laws' is a CP article in the 1/3 Toronto Star saying that, despite pleas from non-native bar owners (in Manitoba etc.) who say they are being discriminated against, the federal government has no plans to stop the growing number of native band councils that are getting around provincial bans by passing their own bylaws that allow smoking. This also involves gambling places like bars with VLTs and casinos.

Gamblers who are in financial trouble often make use of Payday Loan facilities. The 1/6 Windsor Star reports that an Ontario judge has certified a class-action lawsuit against payday loan companies that claims their rates are excessive. The suit seeks \$515M from Money Mart and from its parent, Dollar Financial Group.

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## Religion and gambling

'Churches remain silent as gambling spreads' is an item in the Canadian Christianity.Com that reports on a Terrace, B.C. instance where the local ministerial association delegated a pastor to speak at a public forum on their behalf when a bingo palace was asking the city council to change a bylaw so it could bring slot machines to their community. In this case, the mayor and councillors voted 4-3 to keep slots out of the community. It was a victory, the pastor suspects that might not have happened if people had not made their voices heard. He said that one of the councillors who opposed the slots said "the presence of the people that were speaking against the motion was what influenced her".

In 'Religious bodies protest casino gambling legislation', an article in the 1/9 Stabroek News (GEORGETOWN, Guyana) we read that the National Assembly during Thursday's sitting will be picketed to protest moves by the government to legalise casino gambling in Guyana. We quote: "Faith-based groups charge that government has failed to "count the social cost of this misadventure" and said they will stage the

protest as part of their mass campaign to help force legislators to back off from the controversial measure." And: "The saddest part of this may well be that a complicit media largely ignored or marginalised the submissions by the church ... and were deliberately silent while our children's futures were pawned off to business enterprise," the groups said in a letter to the media.

In spite of the well-known fact that casino gambling has consequences such as increased bankruptcies, suicides, addictions, divorces, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and generalised crime, religious groups that oppose gambling often get reactions like that of the 1/5 Philadelphia Daily News. The article talks of a to us unknown Rev. Jesse Brown who makes people in high places call on the name of the Lord. We quote: 'Exclamations like, "Oh, Lord, here he comes again!" and "Lord, what have I done to deserve this?" are uttered whenever he and his band of annoying activists show up at some government office.'

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## **Poker**

Almost every week we find stories about people who leave their studies or jobs behind in order to make a living as professional poker players. Along with the poker articles cited in the Nova Scotia section, we saw an article in the 1/8 National Post reporting that an Ottawa graduate student - an 'Excellent bluffer' - found poker a way to climb out from under \$30,000 in student loan debt: He went to the Bahamas where he won a US\$1 M poker tournament. Will he go back to his studies? He is scheduled to defend his master's thesis at Carleton University's Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, and we do hope he will show up!

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## **British Columbia**

'Hitting the super 7 jackpot in 2007 may not be all it's cracked up to be' is an ironic item in the January 2 Vancouver Province by Alan Fergus that would be outright funny if the lottery issue wasn't that serious. As we've suggested earlier, reporters should make time to visit lottery outlets in our cities' malls. What I see there is unbelievable: people young and old lining up when the jackpot is extra big. I see some that are well dressed; others look as if they are homeless. Males and females on crutches, in wheel-chairs and/or leaning on walkers, and so on. All seem to be anxious to pay their 'voluntary tax'. In Ontario that tax amounted to the unimaginable amount of \$2.3 billion (lottery and scratch tickets) in 2004-05! All that money was taken from peoples' savings or from the Ontario economy!

The author of the article is right when he points out that winning a jackpot also might be the beginning of certain troubles. I am quite convinced that many purchasers of lottery tickets are really already problem gamblers and I think that our governments ought to be ashamed of their greedy selves which cause these problems.

Another B.C. item is reported in the Editorial, and one more in Religion and gambling.

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## **Alberta**

'Thousands from Vegas of north have a thing for the real deal' is the heading of an article in the 1/3 Edmonton Journal reporting that in the past year 60,000 people flew to the real Las Vegas from Edmonton, up 60% in a single year. 'Though Edmonton has more casinos -- seven -- than any other city in Canada, Las Vegas is Edmonton International Airport's busiest destination and fastest-growing international route', the paper writes. "Alberta is booming and people have more disposable income than ever

before. And Edmontonians obviously like to spend their leisure time travelling and gambling," it adds.

The next day's Edmonton Sun carries a CP item reporting that Alberta's auditor general is investigating a big personal bill left behind by an aide of a former cabinet minister. It is a bit ironic that the \$29,000 bill includes the costs of a Las Vegas bachelor party charged to the aide's government credit card. Should we add here that a city known, as Vegas of the North must expect to get the same reputation the real Las Vegas has? In due time, we expect we will hear more about the outcome of that investigation.

A total of 12 articles in the Calgary Herald and the Calgary Sun talk of the anti-smoking rule in Calgary's bars. Is a bar that makes more money from VLTs than from liquor just like a casino? We could fill the rest of this Newsletter with quotes from those articles, but we'd better wait till real actions or lawsuits are taking place. The 1/10 Calgary Sun states that the lawyer for a group of Calgary restaurants and bars challenging the city's smoking bylaw said a temporary injunction likely wouldn't be filed this week, so we'd better wait till that action is taken.

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## Saskatchewan

An article in the 1/2 Leader-Post shows that gambling is still expanding in this Province. Early this year, the construction of the casino and performing arts centre in Swift Current is to begin. Estimates put the cost of the project at \$23M, but the costs are quickly escalating toward \$30M. The provincial government is reviewing the project and could ask that it be scaled down to reduce the cost. The casino is expected to have 200 slots and nine live game tables; the performing arts centre is to have 700 theatre seats and banquet seating for 500. The casino was approved by 55% of voters in a plebiscite held when the Swift Current's municipal election took place in 2003. Also, construction is to start early this year on a new building for Yorkton's Painted Hand Casino; it should be ready by 2008.

An article in the 1/4 StarPhoenix reports that, despite opposition from neighbours and sky watchers, the SIGA will not change its mind about an eye-catching spotlight display that's to be a part of the new Dakota Dunes Casino. We quote: "We're not prepared to make any moves on that," SIGA spokesperson Stephen Shaheen said Wednesday. "We want it to be spectacular, because we are in the business of entertainment and gaming, and that's what we decided."

One day later this paper has a column: 'Gaming agreement subordinates First Nations', by Doug Cuthand, that contains the telling sentence: 'I've always wondered why the NDP government of Saskatchewan, with its long history of social justice and leaders who came from the pulpit, would get into the gambling business'.

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## Ontario

'Having a gangster jam a gun in your mouth would make most people think twice about continuing a police career. Not Peter Yuen, who was a rookie undercover officer investigating an illegal gambling club in Scarborough when it happened to him in 1990', is a paragraph in an item in the 12/31 Toronto Star.

The 1/2 Belleville Intelligencer has this news: 'The Ontario Racing Commission (ORC) granted permission Dec. 28 for Quinte Exhibition and Raceway to have 17 days of live racing and 364 days of simulcasting in 2007'. That's a decrease of 9 live days from 2006, the paper says. As the new facility isn't ready, the races will be at the Baymount track.

'Skyway Bingo is closing, axing nearly 30 jobs and critical funding for dozens of city charitable groups' is a line in the 1/5 Niagara Falls Review. This closing leaves only one Bingo Hall in St. Catharines.

A letter to the editor in the 1/9 Windsor Star contains these questions: 'Can anyone explain to me why it is that the Highway Tavern has to tear down its smoking shelter or be fined, while Casino Windsor is permitted to have the same thing? Could it possibly be because the government has its hands in the casino's pockets?'

The 1/10 Belleville Intelligencer reports that a lottery scammer managed to defraud an 81-year-old woman of \$3.2M. He'll appear in a Kingston courtroom for sentencing next week.

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## Nova Scotia

Three articles in the Halifax Herald deal with an Online Poker Tournament near Truro. The 1/5 paper says it is a go, the 1/6 reports that the police will monitor it, and the 1/7 states that it is drawing little attention.

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Canada's Gambling Watch Network is not alone in its struggle against the yet continuing expansion of gambling in Canada. Going to <http://www.citizenvoice.ca> will give you more information on this group, while Game Planit reveals the truth about slots and other Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs). Find out how deceptive the machines can be from virtual reels to concealed odds. All things in the EGMs are designed to addict the player. Visit <http://www.gameplanit.com> for more information on this subject.

Anyone who wants to join the class-action suit against Loto-Québec, or to find out more on that issue, should go to a link on website [www.vivaconsulting.com](http://www.vivaconsulting.com) pointing the way.

Also: a group of activists in Nova Scotia established the Web site [gameovervlt.com](http://gameovervlt.com), it has many stories that show what pathological gambling does to individuals and their families.

Our Blueprint for action to reform Canadian gambling law, policies & practices into real public interest will be e-mailed to anyone who asks for it.

We're always open to Guest Editorials and Letters to the Editor. Placing an item doesn't mean that we agree with the opinion expressed. As a coalition of a variety of groups and people, our "party line" leaves room for differences of opinion, and we welcome them!

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## Help!

Due to the closing of our former Internet server, our Web site is presently inaccessible. Its contents are a part of our extensive archives, so it can be rebuilt. We are badly in need of a **volunteer Web Master or Mistress** with the ability and the willingness to do this.

We are always looking for persons who have the time, the interest and the ability to help us finding news articles about gambling from coast to coast. We are doing our best to be a Canada-wide organization, but the fact that many newspapers (especially in Atlantic Canada!) restrict access to their site to subscribers makes it necessary to find activists in all provinces to make sure that items of importance are not missed. All that our activists need is a computer and access to the Internet. Do not be afraid of your own inexperience: in the 7 years of our existence, we have more than once helped new people to get started!

We should add here that Canada's Gambling Watch Network also needs financial help. For some seven years our expenses have been paid mainly from the pockets of

generous activists, and a few years ago we began to try to get regular supporters. We will continue to look for subscribers to our Newsletter. The minimum membership is \$10 per year, the regular is \$20 annually, and any bigger amounts will be received with thanks. We cannot issue receipts that will be recognized by Canada's taxation system. How can we actively oppose gambling without being politically active? Send cheque or money order, payable to Canada's Gambling Watch Network, to our Treasurer, Art Tiesma, 308 Spruce Street, London, ON, N5W 4N5.

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