

Gambling fuelled by government greed

By W.C. Harris

Sarnia Observer

May 15, 2007.

CANADA – "Canadians lost \$14.5 billion gambling in 2006," without getting anything in return.

Here are some other published facts re gambling in Canada. In 1992, \$2.7 billion was lost in gambling in Canada. In 2002, \$11.3 billion was lost. In 2004, the Canada Safety Council called addictive gambling "a public health crisis," saying it accounts for up to 360 suicides a year in Canada. The council called for no further casinos being built, an end to 24-hour casino operations, limits on gambling-related advertising and limits on how much a gambler can lose before being cut off.

It's estimated that 35 per cent of Ontario's over \$5 billion in gambling revenue came from "problem gamblers," yet in 2005, Ontario announced it would spend only \$4 million in two years on a problem gambler public awareness campaign. (Ontario spends over \$250 million a year advertising gambling through the Ontario Lottery Corporation.)

In January 2005, the Ontario government announced Ontario won't build any more casinos. This decision was at least 10 years too late as there were already over 35 venues in Ontario with slot machines. In December 2004, the chief coroner for Ontario considered launching an inquest into gambling-related suicides, however this never happened.

In 2001, Nova Scotia introduced a system to track gambling-related suicides and found 6.3 per cent of suicides were related to problem gambling. If Ontario's rate is similar to Nova Scotia's, Ontario averages 65 gambling-related suicides a year. (No wonder there was no inquest.)

Of course, there's also the other consequences of gambling addictions domestic problems, financial problems, depression, desperation.

The government's decision to legalize gambling, build too many gambling venues, over-advertise gambling, under fund public awareness programs and underestimate the growing social problems of gambling were driven by greed.

Governments must recognize that this is a growing problem and take proactive measures to warn all ages of the numerous problems created with gambling addiction. Mandatory information meetings every year in all high schools would be a good start.