

The Chicago Tribune

Originally posted: May 29, 2009

http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/clout_st/2009/05/group-speaks-out-against-legalizing-video-poker.html

Group speaks out against legalizing video poker

Posted by Dan P. Blake at 4:17 p.m.

Legalizing video poker is the underpinning of a \$29 billion statewide construction plan that only needs Gov. Pat Quinn's signature to become law, and gambling foes today said the new governor needs to understand the inherent social and economic problems signing such a measure might bring.

Speaking at a downtown Chicago church, opponents complained that state lawmakers and the governor did not study closely enough the negative aspects electronic gambling could have on the people of Illinois.

"Every feature of this technology is geared to make people play longer, faster, and at a higher rate of wagering," said Dr. Natasha Dow Schull, an assistant professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who has spent 15 years studying the effects of video poker.

"In other words, to get them to play to 'extinction,' which is a term the gaming industry sometimes uses to describe getting someone to play until all their money is depleted," Schull said.

She said video poker is especially troubling because the machines have high spending options per game and are built to encourage repetitive and high-speed play by pressing buttons and making bets in a matter of seconds.

"There's no need to wait for horses to run, a dealer to shuffle or a roulette wheel to stop spinning," she said.

Dr. Tim Kelly, the executive director of a federal commission that studied gambling's impact a decade ago, said his commission recommended that elected officials should conduct studies looking at the social and economic impact of video gaming in the community before approving such legalization.

"It seems like easy money. It always does and it seems like a way to painlessly tax the population, but as it turns out, what you do is you very painfully tax a portion of the population. Mainly that portion that struggles with pathological and problem gambling," Kelly said.

Calling South Carolina's experiment with legalizing video poker a "nightmare," Dr. Frank Quinn, a psychologist and the founder of the South Carolina Center for Gambling Studies, suggested Illinois could be headed down the same road if the games are legalized.

After trying to regulate the machines for years, South Carolina moved to outlaw them in 1999.

Quinn has not been enthusiastic about video poker, but has coveted a statewide construction program to get people back to work in a down economy.