



Speech by

**BILL FELDMAN**

**MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE**

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Hansard 8 November 2000

### **GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr FELDMAN** (Caboolture—CCAQ) (3.45 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill. In his second-reading speech, the Treasurer referred to the growing community concern about the continuing rapid growth of the gaming industry and its effects on individuals, families and the community at large. That would have to be one of the greatest understatements of the blindingly obvious that has ever been uttered in this place, even by such a bumbling politician as the Treasurer. This is not, as the Treasurer would suggest, a growing concern; the level of concern is way past growing and rapidly approaching outrage. Either the soon to be erstwhile Treasurer does not appear to have a clue about what is going on in the wider community or he simply does not care. The Bill is a classic example of far too little too late.

In country towns around Queensland families are breaking down and businesses are going broke because of the all-pervading gaming machines, or pokies as they are universally known, interacting with and impacting on families. It can be argued that it is up to the individual whether he or she decides to gamble or whether he or she decides to gamble in excess. In a purely theoretical sense, that contention is correct in that nobody is forced to put their money into one of these machines.

In practice, though, the greater the availability of these machines the greater the temptation for people with gambling-related problems to throw their money into them. The method of presentation and operation of these gaming machines is designed specifically and with the intention to influence people who are least able to resist the temptation to put their money in. Flashing lights, ringing bells, music and repetitive actions are all designed to encourage gamblers to continue past the point of entertainment and to the realm of financial harm.

When a significant portion of the disposable income of a town is fed into a poker machine, the amount of money left over to pay for food, rent and discretionary items is severely reduced. Small businesses in the town then suddenly find that their income is reduced and they in turn have trouble paying their bills. When a business is struggling to pay its bills, the almost inevitable reaction is to reduce overheads by reducing staff. This of course is of little consequence to the Treasurer, who obviously does not live in the real world where real people are working or living. This is the same man who, through personal greed, allowed his office to be tainted with the scandal of the net bet affair. This is the man who gave the State's first Internet gaming licence to Gocorp, which included Bill D'Arcy and a couple of his Labor mates amongst its shareholders.

In his article in the Courier-Mail, Matthew Franklin summed up the Treasurer well when he said—

**Mr HAMILL:** I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is deliberately misleading the House in relation to his claims with respect to Gocorp. I find the implication offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn. For his information, I suggest he read the report of Mr Gotterson, QC.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Minister seeks a withdrawal. I ask the member to withdraw.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I withdraw. I refer to Matthew Franklin's article in which he summed up the Treasurer when he said—

"Beattie could hardly believe his Treasurer's political stupidity.

But the full horror of Hamill's mistake could not have been publicly appreciated at the time. This was because Hamill knew when he gave Gocorp the licence that D'Arcy was facing child rape charges.

Even worse, the bureaucrats who run probity checks on casino operators to ensure they're squeaky clean also found that pending child rape charges were no impediment to D'Arcy being given what was effectively a licence to print money."

**Mr HAMILL:** Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Whilst the honourable member may be quoting an ill-informed statement from the media, for the record it ought to be stated that the Office of Gaming Regulation had a watching brief in respect of the interests of Mr D'Arcy, who I might say was neither a director nor a shareholder of the company in question.

**Mr FELDMAN:** No point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker? I will continue. This is the man who obviously sees no problem in giving preferential treatment to somebody as offensive as D'Arcy.

**Mr HAMILL:** Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fouras): Order! Can I suggest that the matters referred to are going very close to sub judice. This morning the Attorney-General indicated that the matter was not concluded and that therefore people should be very careful about mentioning these matters. Secondly, I think the Minister did ask for a withdrawal—

**Mr HAMILL:** The claim that I gave preferential treatment to anybody is offensive. It is quite wrong. It is erroneous. It does not stack up according to the evidence presented in the inquiry of the CJC or the Auditor-General. It is offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member will withdraw.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I will withdraw. Let the record stand as it stands and the people of Queensland know what is going on.

This is why the Treasurer has been promoting Internet gambling in this State: so that problem gamblers can lose their family's food money even faster, and now from the comfort of their own home—if they have not already lost that. He obviously does not care about the cost to the community or individuals, so long as this Government can take money out of it.

The biggest problem with the gambling industry in this State is that the State Government receives huge amounts of money in the form of gambling taxes. It is not prepared to forgo this money in the interests and wellbeing of the community generally. Of course, this is not the attitude present in the Labor Party alone.

**Mr Mickel:** What taxes would you increase, then?

**Mr FELDMAN:** I certainly would not be taking it out of the mouths of the people who can least afford it. The member for Logan represents an area whose residents can least afford it. Maybe he should be looking at how he presents and at how he takes money from the taxpayers of this State. Maybe he should not be representing those people who can least afford to throw money away. Perhaps he should be promoting how they should not.

Both the coalition and this Government are equally to blame. No doubt both are equally reluctant to take the sort of decisive action necessary to combat what has become a cancer in Queensland. In the very next sentence of his second-reading speech the Treasurer referred to the need to preserve the benefits that the gambling industry has provided in this State, such as employment, tourism, investment and recreation and leisure facilities. I will address each of these supposed benefits individually.

The Treasurer's first stated benefit was the good old favourite—employment. I certainly cannot argue on this score. After all, the gambling dens in this State that are passed off as high-class casinos provide jobs, especially for our young. They teach our youth how to serve drinks and wait on tables and gamble professionally. In other words, they teach them how to be obsequious servants of gamblers. We must not forget all the other people they keep in employment—

**Mr Reeves:** You'd boo Santa Claus, you would.

**Mr FELDMAN:** The member for Mansfield talks about the gambling dens of this State being a bit like Santa Claus. Obviously it is not the same Santa Claus I know. He actually brings gifts; he does not take them away.

We must not forget all the people these organisations keep in employment—family counsellors, the people who distribute emergency food parcels and all the others involved in cleaning up the trail of social destruction and misery that problem gamblers leave in their wake. Last but not least, we must remember the police, ambulance and fire officers whose daily job it is to deal with the successful and unsuccessful suicides which occur with monotonous regularity as a result of the hopelessness and loss of self-esteem brought on by gambling addiction.

I suggest that tonight honourable members opposite watch A Current Affair or Today Tonight, on which they will see an Asian problem gambler who has twice locked his child in a car outside one of these facilities that I think a member opposite referred to as being a bit like Santa Claus. I do not remember Santa Claus locking anybody in a car to go and gamble.

The vast majority of the jobs generated by gambling in this State are in fact unpaid, voluntary positions with the likes of St Vincent de Paul, Lifeline and the Salvation Army. I am quite sure that these people would rather be engaged in more productive enterprises than cleaning up the results of gambling.

The next big benefit the Treasurer claims is tourism investment. I would dearly love the Treasurer to explain to this House and the people of Queensland exactly how he arrives at the conclusion that investment in gambling venues provides a net benefit to the people of this State. All that happens is that large companies set up casinos in our State and take huge sums of money out of the community. They pay some to the Government, give an infinitesimal amount to charities and community groups and keep the huge profits for their shareholders.

It never ceases to amaze me how some apparently well-educated people can be so stupid. The mathematics of this situation are quite simple. When a company decides to invest money in a casino in Australia, it is because it can see a profit to be made. The reason that successive State and Federal Governments have encouraged investment in gambling venues is that they, too, can see the profit waiting to be made.

So if the Government is making money and the casino owners are making money, then where is the money coming from in the first place? Is it coming from international tourists losing their money in Australia? Not much. Maybe some, but certainly not much. The vast majority of it is coming out of our communities. It is coming out of the mouths of small children who are not being fed properly because their parents are addicted to gambling. It is coming out of the many charity groups who struggle to feed and clothe those people who are gambling more money than they can afford. It is coming out of their pockets, and they have to clothe and feed the orphans of this gambling addiction. The people of Queensland are left once again to clean up the mess and pick up the bill.

The Treasurer's final benefit claim is in the field of recreation and leisure facilities. I assume by this he means those community facilities that are assisted from time to time by entities such as Jupiters Trust. For the life of me I do not know how the Treasurer can stand up in this House and quite blatantly misrepresent the truth about the myth that the proceeds of gambling somehow enhance our quality of life. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that any gambling money that is directed towards community facilities is money that already belongs to that community and which has simply been stolen out of one pocket and placed in another, accompanied by much self-glorification. The only reason Jupiters Trust exists is to provide a public relations camouflage to hide the real extent of the gambling related costs to our community.

The provision of money to our community in this way is simply designed to draw attention away from the real problem and allow our sanctimonious leaders to make out that they are truly looking after the welfare of the people of Queensland. If they were in fact really worried about the people of this State, they would have introduced a far more wide-ranging reform of gambling laws long ago.

They would start by capping the total number of gaming machines licensed in Queensland and then commence a structured reduction of those numbers on a preset schedule. They would continue by removing the capability of gaming machines, as the member for Nudgee said, to accept currency notes and prevent the future use of credit cards of any description. They would require gaming machines to display clearly the real odds against winning and force them to have automatic shutdown periods to break the paying cycle so that those who are trapped in that cycle actually have to have a break before they stick more money in a machine that they can ill afford to put it in.

They would prohibit the capability of machines to play automatically so that the punter has to at least press a button each time he or she wants to play. They would require the payment of winnings above a certain amount to be made in the form of a non-negotiable cheque and prohibit the locating of automatic teller machines within or near gaming venues, or at least very severely limit the amounts that can be withdrawn at those facilities.

They could totally prohibit the advertising of gambling itself and any reference to gambling when promoting venues such as pubs or clubs. They could insist on a display of anti-gambling messages on gaming machine screens at preset intervals, similar to health warnings on tobacco products. "Gambling may be addictive" or "Do your children have enough to eat?" might be a good start. No doubt there are some decent, community-minded members still left in the ranks of the Labor Party sitting opposite, but unfortunately we have seen time and time again that those few decent, honest and good ones are hopelessly outnumbered. That is why the good ones are not often heard. They are forced to be subservient to the totalitarian party machine that controls every aspect of that party.

Of course, I could go on and on about exactly how much gambling is affecting and hurting our society. Mention has been made of machine licences lapsing, and the Treasurer stated that at some facilities machines were being lined up in banks. I ask him to ensure as he said in this House that, in cases where the commission previously had placed no time limit on the installation of machines, under the Bill existing licensees will have to install the approved number of gaming machines by 1 September 2000. During the meetings of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee I asked whether that meant that those machines had to be in full working order when they were installed or if licensees could do exactly what they intended to do in the first place, that is just bank those machines up and leave them there hooked up but perhaps not working. In the view of those licensees, the provision of the legislation would be met simply by having a full complement of machines. So I ask the Treasurer to ensure that every machine that is installed is in full working order.

It would be remiss of me not to talk about some of the clubs in my area. I will touch on what I consider to be a good aspect of some of them, and I refer to only some of them.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr FELDMAN:** Yes, I bagged gambling and I still bag gambling, but there are some clubs that are trying to do the right thing. The Caboolture sports club, for example, was sponsored by six sporting clubs in my area: cricket, soccer, touch, softball, Rugby Union and the dog obedience school. This club is trying very hard to put something back into the community, not just direct people to the gaming machines.

**Mr Reeves:** Like all the clubs.

**Mr FELDMAN:** No. Unfortunately, it is not like all of them. Some of them are not doing the right thing, but some are. This club, for example—

**Mr Reeves:** And they just happen to be in your electorate.

**Mr FELDMAN:** It is actually in Mr Hayward's electorate. We were both there not so long ago.

Some of these clubs are receiving some benefit after six years. It has taken six years to get some of the benefits back to these clubs; there is now some benefit in what some of these clubs are doing. They are directing some of their money back to supporting the community. At the cricket club, the soccer club and the touch football fields they are paying for a groundsman to do some of the work, which is saving some of these club patrons a lot of time and hard work.

There are some pubs that have been doing the right thing for some time, but that does not necessarily mean that we should be increasing the number of gaming machines that these venues have, because they know that those same machines are going to reduce the number of their own clientele. There are still some, but very few, mum and dad type pubs out there that I know support certain sporting clubs in their own communities. The Woodford Hotel and the D'Aguilar pub are examples. But, as I said, they are mum and dad enterprises with the owners living and working in the community. They are not large hotels. I sometimes wonder exactly how much large business enterprises actually put into the community or whether they direct any inquiries for community funding to the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund and hope they get something in return.

I agree with the concerns that the member for Toowoomba South raised about building another hollow log in which this Government can hide a Statewide program that draws together all the funds but at the end nobody gets anything out of it.

These are the concerns that I have and I hope that they will be addressed. I hope that the problem I raised about the number of machines is addressed and I hope that the people who have gambling problems will be able to have the cycle of their gambling addiction broken by the types of devices on machines that will prevent them from gambling and gambling and gambling and losing everything.

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