

November 22, 1999

The Honorable John McCain, Chairman
The Honorable Ernest Hollings, Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
508 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas Bliley, Chairman
The Honorable John Dingell, Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Slot Machines for Children

Dear Chairmen McCain and Bliley, and Ranking Members Hollings and Dingell:

Recent news reports have revealed an alarming trend in the gambling industry. Slot machines are now featuring child-enticing themes including Candyland, which is popular among very young children, other board games such as Monopoly, as well as the Three Stooges, the Pink Panther, South Park, I Dream of Jeannie, and the Addams Family.¹

Gambling is a dangerous problem for American children. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission reported that as many as 20 percent of adolescents may already be experiencing gambling problems. Further, the Commission reported on a Harvard Medical School study, funded by the gambling industry, which estimated that 7.9 million American adolescents are problem or pathological gamblers. The Commission concluded that the “prevalence of adolescent gambling is a serious problem which demands a broad coalition of efforts.”

¹ See Attachment #1, which includes David Strow, “Nevada Regulators Move Against Cartoon-themed Slot Machines.” *Las Vegas Sun*, September 24, 1999. John Glionna, “Slot Machine Designers Use Controversial Spin; Gaming: Critics Say Depictions of Youth-friendly Pop Culture Characters Are a Lure to Children. Manufacturers Insist That The Target Is Adults.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1999.

Given the Commission's findings, we request that the Senate and House Commerce Committees investigate whether the gambling industry is luring impressionable children to gambling or casinos by employing slot machines bearing cartoon characters and other themes popular with children.

These child-enticing slot machines are the latest innovation in a broader advertising and marketing campaign by casinos and the gambling industry to promote a "family-friendly" image, and, apparently, to bring children to the casinos, and thereby shape the next generation of gambling addicts.

This is an American tragedy. Problem gambling is rife among our children. Children who start gambling early are predisposed to becoming pathological gamblers. According to the Commission,

The available evidence indicates that individuals who begin gambling at an early age run a much higher lifetime risk of developing a gambling problem....Clearly, adolescents are a segment of the population who are at particular risk of developing problems with gambling.

Given this risk of problem gambling among children, and the vulnerability of children to the predations of some in the gambling industry and their marketing ploys, we ought to protect children from efforts to seduce them into gambling via child-alluring themes.

The Commission recommended precisely such protections. In its final report, the Commission was "unanimous in urging elected officials and others to focus on implementing more effective measures to address the problem of adolescent gambling."

We urge the Senate and House Commerce Committees to investigate, subpoena, review and publicly release the market research used to develop these child-enticing slot machines, and to review the broader efforts of the casinos and gambling industry to market gambling to children. That is the least Congress can do to empower parents and protect children from those who would seduce them into the depredations and addictions of gambling.

Sincerely,

Dr. James C. Dobson, President, Focus on the Family; Commissioner, National Gambling Impact Study Commission

Chuck Donovan, Executive Vice President, Family Research Council

Rev. Tom Grey, Executive Director, National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling

Kay James, Chairman, National Gambling Impact Study Commission

Dr. D. James Kennedy, Senior Minister, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

Jean Kilbourne, author, *Deadly Persuasion*

Dr. Richard Land, President, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Rabbi Daniel Lapin

Velma LaPoint Ph.D., Associate Professor of Human Development, Howard University
Richard C. Leone, Commissioner, National Gambling Impact Study Commission
Diane Levin, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; author, *Remote Control Childhood*
Leo T. McCarthy, Former Lt. Governor, California; Commissioner, National Gambling Impact Study Commission
Bob McCannon, Director, New Mexico Media Literacy Project
Bishop Marshall L. Meadors, Jr., The United Methodist Church, Mississippi Area
Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.
Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Ecology, New York University
Gary Ruskin, Director, Commercial Alert
Eunie Smith, President, Eagle Forum of Alabama
Jeffrey K. Taylor, Director of Government Relations, Christian Coalition
David Walsh, Ph.D. President, National Institute on Media and the Family
Dr. Don Wildmon, President, American Family Association

cc: Senator Sam Brownback