



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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**Column for Week of:
October 20, 2008**

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Casinos Seek to Remove Loss Limits

In less than two short weeks, the people of Missouri will vote to either do away with loss limits at casinos or uphold the current law that regulates how much money individuals can lose during a preset time period. This struggle between the gaming industry and the state has been going on for years. Some of us in the State Legislature have successfully fought to keep the loss limits intact because we believe they can help prevent the devastating consequences caused by uncontrolled gambling and help protect Missouri families. But now the casinos are attempting to throw off this unwanted restraint by circumventing the Legislature (where their efforts have failed) and putting their issue directly before the voters through an initiative petition.

Only fairly recently was riverboat gambling even legalized in Missouri. In 1991, lawmakers adopted a bill that ordered the issue to be referred to the voters. On November 3, 1992, Missourians approved the referendum by a 63 percent majority, including current loss limits among a list of other safeguards designed to make Missouri's gambling experience different from that of other states. This included allowing gambling only on riverboats that actually cruised on a river, and players could lose no more than \$500 per excursion—which was implied in the original ballot language to literally mean the time that the boat was traveling on the river.

However, it turns out that Missouri's gambling laws weren't so clear-cut after all, and now we have stationary riverbank casinos that don't sail and are not the family-friendly places they were touted to be. The casino industry's new target is removing one of the last major barriers to having Las Vegas-style gambling here in Missouri—the protective measure called the \$500 loss limit.

I am a vigorous opponent of state-sponsored gambling and have fought against the removal of the loss limits in the Senate just as recently as last year. In addition to other negative effects gambling has on our communities, one I am especially concerned about is the siphoning of our entertainment dollars from Missouri businesses. As families are being more budget-conscious, they may only have so many dollars to dedicate to entertainment. If they overspend on gambling, not only do they hurt their family budget, but they then have fewer dollars to spend on Kansas City Royals or Chiefs games, or even on something as small as renting a movie or shopping at a local store. Worse yet, gambling often leaves families more impoverished and needing more financial assistance from the taxpayers in the form of welfare benefits. The bottom line is that gambling hurts people—mainly low-income families who are especially vulnerable.

Since the big casino lobby did not have success convincing the people's elected representatives that removing the loss limits was a good idea, they have used their big bank accounts to bypass the Legislature. Now the question has been posed to the citizens of this state and we await their decision.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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