

# **The WAGER, Vol. 4(3) - Big Easy dispatch**

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The political discourse surrounding compulsive gambling and the gaming industry changed course earlier this month in New Orleans. Doubting the objectivity of the federally mandated National Gambling Impact Study Commission, a group of state and local legislators united to create the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States. According to its founders, the new group will have no ideological agenda other than research on policy implications, law enforcement, and other topics related to legalized gambling.

Florida State Senator Steven Geller, president of the new group, has criticized the composition of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. In particular, he has questioned the ideological neutrality of an organization whose members include MGM Grand chairman and CEO J. Terrence Lanni and Focus on the Family founder James Dobson.

But there may be another motive for the group's formation. Geller's National Council of Legislators from Gaming States is composed primarily of state and local law makers, whereas the Impact Commission has only one state official in its ranks. As federal legislators contemplate increased regulation and taxation of the gaming industry, state governments want to hold on to their regulatory power. According to Geller, "Gambling has been the province of the states since before they were states, when they were colonies." Furthermore, he believes that since it is the state governments that ultimately deal with the social and economic consequences of gambling, their political voice deserves to be heard.

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission is nearing the end of its two-year mandate, with a report due to the President in June. The National Council of Legislators from Gaming States plans to have its report prepared by the end of 1999. Perhaps only then will we be able to understand the dynamics of a process that may have serious implications for the future of legalized gambling.

## Founding Members of the National Council of Legislators from Gaming States

Steven Geller, State Senator, Florida  
Willie Brown, Mayor of San Francisco  
Chuck Patton, Director, Mississippi Gaming Commission  
Frankie Sue Del Papa, Attorney General, Nevada  
Lana Oleen, State Senator, Kansas  
Michael Caron, State Representative, Connecticut  
Richard Hill, President, National Indian Gaming Association  
Rebecca Paul, President, Georgia Lottery Corp.  
Benjamin Nolt, Executive Secretary, Pennsylvania Horse Racing Commission

**Source:** Yerton, Stewart. New panel to study gambling; Group concerned about objectivity. (1999, January 9) The Times-Picayune (New Orleans). p.C1.

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