

Professor Assails Inaccurate Claim by Congressman, Encourages Responsible Internet Gambling Regulation
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Dr. Jeffrey L. Derevensky, a leading professor at McGill University, contends that Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.) incorrectly cited the university's research on gambling addiction in arguing for the continued prohibition on Internet gambling. Derevensky in fact believes that the regulation of online gambling is an opportunity to put in place safeguards to combat problem and underage gambling.

In a mark up of the Payments System Protection Act (H.R. 5767) in the House Committee on Financial Services on June 25, 2008, Rep. Bachus, citing research at McGill, claimed that one-third of college students who gambled online attempted suicide.

"This assertion, which is reportedly based upon our empirical research, is not predicated upon any factual evidence," responded Derevensky in an interview with the Safe and Secure Internet Gambling Initiative. "None of the studies conducted with adolescents or college students, to the best of my knowledge, have looked at a connection between Internet wagering and suicide attempts." Derevensky raised these same concerns in a letter sent last week to Reps. Bachus and Barney Frank (D-Mass.)

Derevensky believes there is an opportunity for Congress to better protect consumers in a regulated environment. "If Congress is serious about minimizing the threat posed by Internet gambling, it should look to create an environment where Internet gambling operators are required to put in place safeguards that protect against compulsive and underage gambling."

Last week, a study conducted jointly by the University of Western Ontario and University of Nevada, Las Vegas called for the legalization and regulation of online gambling.

"Just as legalized commercial gambling in casinos allows for governments to regulate it, so, too, could the legalization of online gambling allow for better regulation and attempts to reduce the growth of problem gamblers," said June Cotte, associate professor at the University of Western Ontario, as reported by Poker News.

Existing technology and security controls have already proven to be effective in addressing compulsive gambling. Safeguards currently available in the industry include the ability to control the amount of money wagered, set limits on amounts bet and amounts lost, restrict the duration that someone can play, identify and stop players whose gambling patterns seem out of the ordinary, and allow for consumers to be excluded from online gambling.

"It is disappointing that Rep. Bachus is using scare tactics and false claims in an attempt to justify why Congress should limit my ability to gamble online," said Jeffrey Sandman, spokesman for the Safe and Secure Internet Gambling Initiative. "We are encouraged by the academic community's support of Internet gambling regulation. They emphasize the important point that consumers will be better protected if there are safeguards put in place to combat underage and problem gambling."

The Internet Gambling Regulation and Enforcement Act of 2007 (H.R. 2046), introduced by Rep. Frank, would establish an enforcement framework for licensed gambling operators to accept bets and wagers from individuals in the U.S. It includes a number of built-in consumer protections, including safeguards against compulsive and underage gambling, money laundering, fraud and identity theft. A companion piece of legislation that would ensure the collection of taxes on regulated Internet gambling activities, the Internet Gambling Regulation and Tax Enforcement Act of 2008 (H.R. 5523) was introduced by Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA).

Additionally, Rep. McDermott introduced last week, the Investing in our Human Resources Act (H.R.6051), which would direct new revenue generated by regulated Internet gambling activities to be spent on job training for those in the declining sectors of the economy and educational assistance for foster care youth. The bill also includes provisions to encourage responsible Internet gambling behavior and an awareness of unsafe practices, something which has been praised by problem gambling advocates.

"Though I support the dedication of resources to raise awareness about problem gambling, I encourage Congress to also provide appropriate funding for research, treatment and the prevention of problem gambling," added Derevensky.

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