

Gambling on Gambling

Written by William Reed
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Gambling and gambling-related problems are common among all racial and ethnic groups, but there's evidence that African Americans are more likely to experience more serious gambling-related troubles than White Americans.

At the forefront of gambling's rise across America have been Black politicians. Recently, Florida's first African-American lieutenant governor resigned her position because of a scandal involving a purported veterans' charity that authorities said was a front for a \$300 million gambling operation. Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll, a 53-year-old Republican was not among those charged.

But Carroll will hardly be the sole Black politician with a role in gambling in America. As gambling remains legally restricted in the United States, its availability and method of expansion is often based on actions by Black politicians. In 2007, U.S. gambling activities generated gross revenues (the difference between the total amounts wagered minus the funds or "winnings" returned to players) of \$92.27 billion.

Few can argue the economic impact of legalized gambling: construction jobs toward building casinos, staffing of the facility by local employees, and suppliers for ongoing casino operations, all provide multiplier effects that ripple throughout the overall economy. Black politicians have played pivotal roles in cities such as Detroit and in hamlets like Tunica and other Mississippi towns along the Gulf Coast, in causing gambling to be viewed as "appropriate economic development tools." For example, commercial casinos provided 354,000 jobs, and state and local tax revenues of \$5.2 billion as of 2006.

Companies in this industry operate gambling facilities or offer gaming activities, including

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casinos, casino resorts and hotels, bingo halls, lotteries, and off-track betting. Nevada is the only state where casino-style gambling is legal statewide. All other states that allow casino-style gambling restrict it to small geographic areas (e.g., Atlantic City, N.J. or Tunica, Miss.). As sovereign nations, American Indian tribes are allowed to open and operate casinos.

For example, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community owns Mystic Lake Casino Hotel south of Minnesota's Twin Cities. In some states, casinos are restricted to "riverboats," large multi-story barges that are permanently moored in a body of water. Legal gambling revenues in 2007 were: Card Rooms – id="mce_marker".18 billion; Commercial Casinos – \$34.41 billion; Charitable Games and Bingo – \$2.22 billion; Indian Casinos – \$26.02 billion; Legal Bookmaking – id="mce_marker"68.8 million; Lotteries – \$24.78 billion and Pari-mutuel wagering – \$3.50 billion. Grand Total – \$92.27 billion.

Many say Prince George's County Executive Rushern Baker's support for MGM Resorts International's casino plan at National Harbor may lead him to one of the country's best paying jobs. Baker was the impetus behind the MGM bid to build an \$800 million casino-resort on a hill in the county that overlooks the nation's capital. The National Harbor MGM is expected to serve as a beacon for more than 40 million visitors to the capital region each year who gamble. As general manager of the National Harbor MGM, Baker would make five times his id="mce_marker"74,540 per year government salary.

If Baker joins the ranks of gambling operators he'll mainly provide a place or a means to play games of chance, including slot machines (slots), video poker, and table games such as roulette, baccarat, blackjack, and craps (dice). The house take on slot machines varies, depending upon the denomination of the slot machine, but generally runs between 5 and 10 percent. The take on most table games may be higher, from 15 to 30 percent. State lottery games often retain between 30 and 40 percent.

A lot of Blacks may join Baker in the industry. Over the next 10 years, jobs in the industry are expected to increase by 470,000. Career possibilities range from architecture to accounting to hotel management, computer science and information technology. Industry employees receive highly competitive salaries and benefits packages that can include health care benefits, retirement plans, paid vacation, child care options and training programs. The industry consistently has extremely

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