

Gambling: Let People (Not the Government and not “the” People) Decide

Why should it be up to the US Department of Justice, or this or that group of politicians or lobbyists, or some percentage of your state’s voters, whether or not you can place a bet on the outcome of a sporting event, a roll of the dice, a spin of the wheel, or what cards get dealt at a poker table?

Since a 2011 re-interpretation of the Wire Act, states have been able to permit, license, and regulate “intrastate” online gambling — that is, gambling where both sides of bets are located in the same state, even if the bets are placed over the Internet (for example, online poker games where all parties are located within their borders).

In December, rumors began to circulate that the US Department of Justice plans a re-re-interpretation of the Wire Act to crack down on such activities, which currently take place in Nevada, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania.

Meanwhile, voters in a number of states decided ballot issues related to gambling in the 2018 election. In my home state of Florida, a coalition funded by the Walt Disney Company, the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and an anti-gambling group successfully pushed through a measure requiring a statewide popular vote to license any new non-Seminole casinos.

The motives for such actions are obvious but mixed. Some people think gambling is immoral and shouldn’t be allowed. Some companies (and some criminals) know that limiting gambling is better for their bottom lines than allowing it, and can afford better lobbyists and slicker advertising than new companies trying to get into the business.

Of course, most people who want to gamble find their way to the areas where it’s allowed (but regulated), or buy into their state governments’ own versions (lottery tickets, for example), or just make bets with friends in the reasonably certain knowledge that they’ll never get arrested at their weekly poker games or while handing over the money they (foolishly) bet against the Kansas City Chiefs to go all the way this year.

But why should anyone have to sneak around? Again, I ask:

In what universe is it legitimately the business of DoJ, or Disney, or the Seminole Tribe, or a legislature, or the little old lady next door who thinks that a deck of cards is The Devil’s Picture Book, if you and I want to bet five bucks on the outcome of a coin flip or anything else?

If I want to put money down on the spin of a roulette wheel, it’s my money. If you don’t, then don’t. Problem solved. Unless, that is, you just have an unscratched itch to run other

people's lives. In which case that should remain your problem, not mine.