
OPINION COLUMN

Casino debate must end with a 'No'



By Sikander Hashmi
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Everyone likes to win. Nobody wants to lose.

In the current casino debate, proponents of a casino in Kingston want our city to reap the anticipated financial benefits. Since Kingston and Gananoque are in the same new gaming zone, Kingston's win will be Gananoque's loss.

Although the opening of a new casino in Kingston may appear to be a win for the city, it will be a loss for at least some of its citizens.

Let's take John Doe and Jane Doe as examples. They will walk in through the doors of the casino, much more than once, with aspirations of big wins but will leave with disappointing losses.

These losses might not only take a toll on John and Jane. They could bring suffering to their family members as well.

The Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario offers a long list of adverse effects that families of problem gamblers could suffer. John's family may one day learn that he has wasted their savings and property on gambling, which could leave them feeling fearful, angry and betrayed. The stress of gambling problems could cause Jane's partner to suffer from serious health problems, such as anxiety, depression and even poor sleep, bowel problems, headaches and muscle pains. Her children may feel forgotten, depressed and angry. John's gambling problems could lead him to inflict physical or emotional abuse upon his partner, elder parents or children.

John and Jane may already be suffering from mental illnesses or substance abuse problems and the added complications of problem gambling could increase the suffering for them and their family members. The report prepared by our public health unit cites multiple studies when it states that mental illness and substance abuse rates are typically higher in problem gamblers.

The two Kingstonians may end up committing suicide, which would leave their families, especially their children, devastated. The report indicates that some studies have found higher suicide rates amongst gamblers.

With students making about 10% of the city's population, John and Jane will likely be joined by some students who will start spending more time in the casino than in the classroom. A 2007 study of over 1,500 university students in Ontario, published in the Journal of Gambling Issues, found that students close to a casino experienced more serious problem gambling than students who were far from a casino.

Unfortunately, John and Jane will not be alone as the percentage of problem gamblers in our community will likely go up. The public health unit report presents Minnesota as an example. The legalization of the lottery there between 1990 and 1994, along with a large increase in the number of casinos, increased the rate of pathological and problem gambling from 2.5% to 4.4%, according to the Center for Addiction Studies at the University of Minnesota.

Let's assume the impact isn't as drastic here in Kingston and the percentage of problem gamblers goes up by merely one percentage point. This figure appears to be statistically insignificant, but it represents more than 1,200 of our family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues – and possibly their families – who could end up suffering from some of the effects described above. Our casino win will truly be their loss.

On behalf of my fellow Kingstonians who love this city and care for our fellow citizens, I hope and pray that our leaders make the right decision and say "no" to a casino in our city.

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Muslimwoman

Great article, Sikander. There are enough ways to gamble already in the GTA. Gambling at Casinos, etc. is never set up for people to win ...sure the odd one will. But so many will come back empty handed after losing their hard earned money. Not to mention the crime it brings (prostitution, drugs, etc.). The more prevalent problem is addiction. You believe that you will

"win back what you've lost" or "you will win big one of these days". Glad that Toronto and GTA Muslims are seeing the sense in this and are working with Faith Leaders and some City Councillors to challenge the slick presentations and persuasion being made by Las Vegas style mega corporations.

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