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GAMING AND GAMBUING LAW Cases and Materials



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GAMING AND GAMBLING LAW

Cases and Materials

Kevin Washburn

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PREFACE

Commercial gambling has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy in the last three decades. Trillions of dollars have been gambled and billions have been lost and earned. Brick and mortar gambling establishments now exist in most American states and illegal sport betting and Internet gaming is, no doubt, occurring in all of them. Indian gaming, which first developed in the 1970s, is now occurring in around 30 states. Most of the states without Indian casinos nevertheless have lotteries, horseracing, bingo, or riverboats. Gambling is ubiquitous in American culture.

What is gambling? The legal boundaries of the term are ill-defined and courts often have difficulty determining how broadly it should reach. Consider the following questions: is the day-trading investor "gambling" when he "plays" the stock market? Is the political candidate "gambling" when she invests millions of dollars of her own and others' money to seek political office, uncertain if she will prevail? Is the patient "gambling" when he chooses surgery over another treatment? Is the average student "gambling" when she attends college, not certain whether there will be a job for her when she graduates? And to draw a finer point, if job opportunities are rare, is a law student gambling when she attends law school? Worse, what about the student earning a Ph.D. in English? Are young parents "gambling" when they pay premiums on life insurance policies so that there will be funds available to raise their children if they die unexpectedly? Is the MIT-trained mathematician "gambling" when he plays blackjack with a predetermined amount of money fully aware of the probabilities in the game and the strategies available to maximize those probabilities to his own benefit?

If betting on an uncertain outcome that is partially determined by luck constitutes "gambling," then most human beings are guilty of gambling many times every day. So why is casino gambling or sports-betting subject to American gambling laws while so many other gambling activities, such as entering the stock market or politics, or choosing medical treatment, investing in an education, or buying life insurance, are not? What are the particular concerns that lead us to apply our gambling laws to activities that happen in casinos, but not to the other activities of life?

xx Preface

Gambling poses numerous riddles in American law and society. In some jurisdictions, gambling is subject to a full and outright prohibition. In others, it is authorized, but only in a very limited manner. In still others, it is legal and even encouraged. Indeed, a majority of American state jurisdictions authorize a particular limited form of gambling, the state lottery, that is not only lawful, but marketed aggressively using public funds. In some of these jurisdictions, state law strongly limits or even prohibits other forms of gambling. Even in jurisdictions in which gambling has been broadly legalized, it is highly regulated. What drives the decision to prohibit gambling or to legalize and regulate it? What are the concerns at work in this calculus? When the decision is made to legalize and regulate gambling, what ought to be the goals of regulation? Indeed, what are the risks presented by the activity and what are the problems sought to be addressed by regulation?

Still another reflection of the enigmatic status of gambling in the United States is this question: what constitutes "fair" gambling? If gambling is a legal and regulated commercial enterprise, what are the responsibilities of the vendor regarding the "game" itself. What is the casino selling? Is it merely providing "entertainment" or is it offering a fair game? That is, must the vendor also provide each player-patron an even playing field as to the game itself? Must the vendor, for example, offer the same gaming opportunity to all patrons, or may the vendor change the rules and even exclude particularly successful patrons from play precisely because they are so successful? May players cooperate with one another to try to minimize the casino's advantage, for example, in a blackjack game in which the game involves players betting against one another and the house? When the patron approaches the blackjack table, is the casino merely offering the patron "entertainment" or is it offering terms that are far more specific? From the patron's vantage point, is the patron merely buying the opportunity to get lucky or is the patron buying the opportunity to use all his skills to make money at the casino?

These are some of the difficult questions that will be addressed in the coming chapters. The first two chapters are closely related. Chapter 1 addresses the fundamental legal question of what constitutes gambling, that is, what is the legal definition of gambling in the laws as interpreted by the courts in the United States. However, the definition of gambling in any given regulatory or prohibitory law is necessarily dependent on the underlying reason for regulating or prohibiting gambling. Chapter 2 takes up the specific concerns that motivate the prohibition or regulation of

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gaming and thus sheds additional light on how broadly gambling ought to be defined in the law.

Next, the book examines prohibitory approaches to gambling. In Chapters 3 and 4, it explains the legal strategies that have been used to prohibit or discourage gambling in the United States. Chapter 3 takes up private law strategies for discouraging gambling and draws upon the myriad issues that arise from gaming law's nexus with contract law and conflicts of law. Chapter 4 explores federalism and the inherent difficulties in maintaining a gambling prohibition within a nation that has numerous political subdivisions that are authorized to make their own policies about gambling. It also addresses many of the federal laws that were principally developed as tools to prevent unlawful gambling.

Chapters 5 through 8 address issues that arise in efforts to legalize and regulate gambling. Chapter 5 highlights the cross-boundary problems and the difficulties in limiting the expansion of gambling and limiting gambling to certain geographic areas. Chapter 6 takes up licensure, which is the leading regulatory strategy for addressing the potential harms of gambling, and introduces the due process questions that arise in a regime that allows wide discretion for regulators. It also addresses the vexing issues that arise in light of the inevitable and sometimes unhealthy relationship between organized sports and gambling.

Chapter 7 addresses the nature of the regulation of the players and the games themselves, dealing with the relationship between the casino or gaming operator and the consumer. It also addresses what constitutes cheating in the casino context.

Finally, Chapter 8 addresses issues of taxation that are unique to the gambling context and applies many of the principles presented earlier in the course. Taxation requires us to address fundamental questions about the nature of gambling, such as whether the player engages in gambling for entertainment or as a commercial enterprise for profit. Chapter 8 thus brings us full circle and requires us to address the initial questions raised in the first two chapters. What kind of behavior is this and what is the purpose of taxation?

Kevin Washburn

November 2010 Albuquerque

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The genesis for this book was a seminar and then a course at the University of Minnesota Law School. Before joining the faculty at Minnesota, I served as General Counsel of the National Indian Gaming Commission. During my time there, I realized that Indian gaming was regulated much like other forms of commercial gaming across the United States. While some of my Indian law colleagues teach courses on Indian gaming law, most of these courses focus on aspects of federal Indian law and concentrate very little on the general regulatory structure of gambling that occurs inside Indian casinos and in most other American gambling venues. As I taught a course on general gambling law for the first time, I sensed a need for a book that recognizes the common concepts and legal principles that cross all forms of gambling.

In preparing this manuscript, I had tremendous assistance from students and research assistants. At Minnesota, I benefited greatly from the guidance and assistance of Ben Hendrick and Lotem Almog Levy, as well as Julie Strother. I am also grateful to the Prairie Island Sioux Community as well as the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community for providing my classes back-of-the-house tours of their respective gaming operations, the Treasure Island Casino and the Mystic Lake Casino. I am grateful that then-Dean Alex Johnson and then-Associate Deans Steve Befort and Jim Chen allowed me to explore this new course at Minnesota. Because Minnesota has a robust gaming market and a sophisticated bar, it was a fantastic place to begin.

The manuscript was further refined when I taught the course at Harvard Law School. Approximately 60 students enrolled in the course, the first general course on gambling law ever offered in that school's history. The class benefited greatly by visits from Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., President of the American Gaming Association, former Rep. Jim Leach of Iowa, who was then serving as director of the Kennedy School's Institute of Politics, and Massachusetts State Treasurer Tim Cahill. I am grateful to the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut which hosted a back-of-the-house tour of its casino for the class, and to then-Dean Elena Kagan and Associate Dean Andy Kaufman for providing generous funding for the course and allowing me to teach

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