

STATEMENT

COMPREHENSIVE PROBLEM GAMBLING BILL (HR 2906)

MIKE RYAN

My name is Mike Ryan and I'm a compulsive gambler. I first uttered those words on February 12, 2008, at a Gambler's Anonymous meeting. A few days prior, on February 7, 2008, my life and my family's life forever changed due to my gambling problem. I came into work that morning and was told my boss wanted to see me. He proceeded to inform me that I was terminated. In addition to using my own money to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars, he discovered that I was also using the company credit card, among other things, to finance my gambling habit. I told him I intended to pay it back (which I did with the help of my parents) and that I was only "borrowing" the money but it was too late. I could no longer be trusted. Because of gambling, I had become everything I abhor. I became a liar, cheat and a thief. My reputation has been forever tarnished and most importantly I lost the respect from my family and friends.

I asked myself "How did I get to this point?" I'm well educated with a Bachelor's degree in economics and a Masters degree in Sport Management. I was raised the right way by my parents and certainly knew right from wrong. Sadly, there are no easy answers except to say that I wanted to stop gambling but couldn't. These days, you don't even need a bookie. I was a sports bettor and found myself gambling on-line everyday in 2007 from the comfort of my home and work office.

In addition to losing my job that day, I've also lost my home to foreclosure, declared bankruptcy, rifled through my entire savings including my 401 k, destroyed my credit rating, had thoughts of committing suicide and most likely will divorce. My beautiful wife has stood with me as we have dealt with the devastation my gambling has caused our family. Recently, however, it has become overwhelming. It's been 19 months since I've gambled and we are still digging out of the hole I created with no end in sight. Although we still love each other very much, the resentment and hurt that she feels towards me (rightfully so) is too much to bear for her.

This bill, if enacted, will provide funds to educate, increase awareness and treat problem gambling. Currently, the Federal Government provides millions of dollars to treat alcohol and drug addiction but zero dollars to treat problem gambling. This is an important point because most problem gamblers, by definition, have lost all their money and have no way to pay for treatment. In my opinion, going only to Gamblers Anonymous meetings is not enough. I know that would not have worked for me. I would probably be "white knuckling" it right now if I hadn't been fortunate enough, through the generosity of my former employer, to be treated at Williamsville Wellness Center (most insurance companies do not pay for treatment of a gambling addiction). Williamsville Wellness is a treatment center located outside Richmond, Virginia that focuses exclusively on Problem Gambling. Through intense therapy, I was able to find

out the reasons why I gambled so I could lead a normal and productive life. I ask you to visit their website www.nongambler.com for more information.

There are millions of men and women out there like me who are compulsive gamblers and need help. With the proliferation of gambling in our country, this problem will only get worse and we, as a nation, have a responsibility to treat these people.

We need your help! I urge you to ask your Senator or Congressman to support and sign on to the Comprehensive Problem Gambling bill (HR 2906).

I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.

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