

A message from Governor Bob Riley...

As your Governor, I took an oath to uphold the laws of this state, and I intend to keep that oath. Recent events related to gambling in Alabama have generated a great deal of interest throughout the state, so I am writing you today to set the record straight about Alabama's gambling laws.

The Alabama Supreme Court has ruled twice in the last three months in cases that define what is legal and what is not legal regarding playing bingo. And playing bingo on a slot machine and calling it "electronic bingo" does not meet the Alabama Supreme Court's definition of what is legal.

Fortunately these conservative judges have refused to give the simple word 'bingo' an expansive, liberal interpretation that would legalize full-blown, Las Vegas-style, slot-machine gambling in Alabama. Against the wishes of the gambling interests, they have simply applied the letter of the law. Their rulings confirm that bingo means exactly what we all know it means--a game played by human players on cards.

While 8 of the 9 members on the Supreme Court are Republican, this is not a partisan issue. One Democratic federal judge in Huntsville and three Democratic state court judges in Birmingham have also recently held that so called "electronic bingo" is not bingo at all and is illegal.

The Alabama Supreme Court issued two recent opinions, the most recent one being released last week, that establish a six-part test to determine if a game meets the legal definition of bingo. For instance, the court has held that, to play bingo, human interaction must be involved. The Supreme Court held that when playing a legal game of bingo a player must mark a "card" after information is called out and must be the first to yell "Bingo" in order to win. A machine cannot play the game of bingo for a person—the player must be an active participant.

Of course, the slot machines in these illegal casinos require no such interaction. In fact, to play these slot machines, one just pushes a button a few times, and, within a matter of seconds a machine tells you if you have won. You certainly do not have to be the first to yell "Bingo" in order to win. You could do it blindfolded! Based on the Supreme Court's ruling, it is crystal clear that the slot machines being used to play so called "electronic bingo" are illegal.

In 62 of our 67 counties, Democratic and Republican prosecutors have stopped numerous slot machine gambling operations that said they were only playing "electronic bingo," but these illegal facilities remain in a few counties because some

public officials refuse to enforce the law. This inaction has allowed gambling bosses to operate their illegal casinos with impunity.

Regardless of whether you believe this form of gambling is good or bad for Alabama, the Supreme Court has said that it is illegal. No one should be above the law, and as long as I am Governor, I will do everything in my power to enforce all of Alabama's laws equally and impartially. There can be no exception for a select few who, because of their money and influence, believe that they are above the law. That is why I have directed the Task Force on Illegal Gambling to enforce all of Alabama's gambling laws, as stated in the Alabama Constitution and interpreted by the Alabama Supreme Court.

Additionally, it is important to note that the casino bosses are, at best, contorting the truth, and at worst, telling outright lies about gambling in the state. They want you to think that this is just a form of innocent bingo, but in reality, these illegal slot machines destroy families, local economies, and state budgets.

In a story that was printed in the Birmingham News on Sunday, we see an example of possible public corruption occurring within Victoryland, our State's largest illegal casino. As many of you know, former Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford was a major proponent of bringing slot machine gambling to the Birmingham race track, which is owned by Milton McGregor. McGregor also owns Victoryland in Macon County where there are currently 6,000 slot machines being played 7 days a week.

The Birmingham News reported that a lawsuit has been filed that alleges that Milton McGregor, the owner of Victoryland, "arranged for Langford to win more than 521 substantial jackpots representing more than 1.5 million dollars by manipulating and controlling bingo games and that they engaged in this conduct in hopes of receiving political favor and to promote approval of business dealings that included the approval of electronic bingo in Birmingham Alabama, where Langford, a convicted felon, formerly served as Mayor and where McGregor owns a dog racing facility."

The 521 jackpot wins took place in just three years. The Birmingham News reported that during 2008 alone, Langford won \$729,350 in 275 jackpots on 24 visits to Victoryland. That is an average of more than 10 jackpot wins per visit. Langford's winnings at Victoryland were discovered when he had to produce his tax records in a lawsuit. If this is true, it is another example of how these folks believe that there is one set of rules for everyone else and a different set of rules for themselves and their friends. Langford was convicted in 2009 of taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from political operatives in exchange for giving them business.

Last Friday, as the Task Force on Illegal Gambling was attempting to seize illegal slot machines at Victoryland, lawyers for Victoryland asked a State Court Judge to stop the Task Force and told the Judge that Victoryland was in full compliance with the bingo laws of Alabama. By Monday, only three days later and after staying open all weekend, Victoryland shut down and told the press that they had to make changes to their equipment in order to be in compliance with the law.

If the Task Force had not acted last week, Victoryland would still be operating illegally today. Either you are in compliance with the law or you are not. It is clear that Victoryland was operating illegally last Friday, and that they knew that they knew that they were.

I hope that this provides some clarification for you on this issue. Thank you for your prayers and support and I would ask that you also pray for our State.

Sincerely,

Governor Bob Riley

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