



**AMERICAN
LEGION**

Greetings, Mr. Chair and members of the Veterans & Military Affairs Committee. My name is Tim Engstrom, and I am the gambling manager for American Legion Post 550 in Bloomington. We don't own a building. We conduct gambling at two local bars. Because so many other charities in local bars serve one cause, such as this sport or that sport, we end up a critical source of revenue for many local needs.

We do a lot for veterans, as I'm sure you can guess, but today, I want to show how important our community work is, too. Last year, Bloomington Schools budget cuts killed a summer program to teach English to high school kids who are new to America. This enabled them to attend regular high school in the fall. The program had nowhere else to go but to American Legion Post 550. We were able to donate \$3,000 so the program could survive.

Go to Kennedy High School. There is a pantry. It has notepads, pencils, deodorant, toothpaste and more for kids whose families can't provide these common items. Who funds it? We do.

Drive around the community, and there all these things here and there we support. Food shelf. Arts center. Youth sports. Youth programs. Closet of Hope. Fourth of July fireworks. Medical care. Flags at the schools. Even the needlework club at the community center. We care.

When the Legislature in 2023 stripped features from e-pulltab games, we knew it would impact our ability to raise revenue for these programs. Now, it is happening. ACM tells us etab revenue is down nearly 20 percent statewide. That's January compared to December.

Let me remind you courts have ruled several times that these features are not breaking the 2012 agreements with casinos. Etabbs don't have jackpots. They don't have unlimited bets. Harming etabbs is not going to result in greater revenue at casinos. People will continue to go to their favorite bars. These changes, all they do is result in less revenue for charities. If I can't help a veteran service officer house a homeless veteran, it's because of these etab changes.

Meanwhile, the price of games goes up. Minimum wage goes up. I have to offer safe and sick time now. Other prices rise. Guess what? The pulltabs still cost \$2 apiece. You don't have to be an economist to understand there ends up being fewer donations to go around.

Of my two locations, one is rather new for gambling, so I can't use its numbers. For the other, overall net receipts were down 29 percent from January this year compared to January last year. Paper pulltabs were down 24 percent. Etabbs were down **44 percent**. One reason numbers are down is likely high grocery prices, but, clearly, the main reason is customers dislike the new games. They tell my pulltab sellers they want the bonus features back. We try to make lemonade out of lemons and make the best of a bad situation. Meanwhile, I still have to pay 33 percent of net receipts in taxes.

I want to be clear about our official stance: Posts of The American Legion would love to have our features back. If we get them back, we would still need to reduce the highest-in-the-nation taxes. Charities have been asked for tax relief for two decades now. It's time. Thank you, all.

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