

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Wednesday 25 July 2007

### GAMING MACHINES (HOURS OF OPERATION) AMENDMENT BILL

Adjourned debate on second reading.  
(Continued from 20 May. Page 197.)

**The Hon. A.M. BRESSINGTON:** I rise to indicate my support for this bill and, again, I will be brief. I worked in hotels for about 15 years and, in one particular venue in the northern suburbs, I was a gaming machine manager. That venue made it a point to be open at 8 o'clock in the morning, and I saw some tragic cases of people who were gambling and poker machine addicts. The children of those families suffered greatly because of the hours of operation of that venue. Mothers who were on their way to drop their kids off at school would come into the venue to have a quick flutter and to reserve a machine before they took their kids to school. They would be back within 15 minutes, and they would sit there until 3 o'clock when it was time to pick up the kids. They would drop their kids off at home and would regularly return to the venue and stay until almost closing time. Goodness knows what was happening to those children while those mothers (and, after work, the fathers) were playing the poker machines.

I also recall travelling from Queensland to work for a hotel down here just before poker machines were introduced into South Australia. The prime object of the proprietor of the hotel at that time was obviously to make money, which is not a bad thing. However, his focus was on making it a family-friendly hotel and a place for people to gather, with activities such as raffles in the front bar to feed social clubs and whatever else, as well as pool competitions and other things. However, once pokies came in, all the socialising aspect of being a hotel owner ceased and the sole aim was to put as many poker machines into that hotel and reap as much profit as possible for the least amount of effort. In order to coax people into the pokies room, free meals were offered, and half the people would not even finish their meal before they were up and playing the poker machines.

There has been a significant change in the social aspect of hotels since poker machines were introduced. I recall one Christmas Eve when a client had, for the first time in five years, overcome a drinking problem and had secured a job for himself. His father-in-law had, some would say stupidly, gone guarantor for him with a credit card provider so that he could have a Christmas with his children where they would actually receive Christmas presents. This gentleman came up to me in the front bar and asked me to direct him to the pokies room and, being an employee of the hotel, I was bound to tell him. However, I said to him, 'Perhaps you should think twice about venturing in there, given your past history. You wouldn't want to do anything to blow this Christmas for your children.' His comment to me was, 'I have absolutely no intention of playing the pokies; I just want to have a quick glance at the renovations that have been done to the hotel before I go home.'

So at midnight I transferred from the front bar into the pokies room and at 12.30 this gentleman approached me to give him cash from his card. He was drunk and when I

asked him how much of the money on the card he had spent on poker machines he had no idea, but it worked out that he had only \$200 left on that card and that was his children's Christmas down the drain. The shocking part of it was that, when I refused to give him the last \$200 on the card and told him to go home and think about it, the owner of the hotel came to me and asked me what the problem was. When I explained the situation, his comment to me was, 'For God's sake, get off your soapbox and give him the money.' That shows the moral decline of a business owner—someone I knew for many years before I came down here to work—and it shocked me that in a very short period of time the dollar pay-off had become more important to this person than being a responsible member of an already economically and socially compromised community.

I left that hotel eventually and went to work for another, and the attitude of the owner of that hotel (which had as many poker machines crammed into it as was absolutely possible) was very similar to that of the previous hotel owner. The comments the Hon. Dennis Hood made in his speech last time on this issue are relevant: that he drives past hotels and at 6 a.m. people are lined up to go into these rooms and are more than willing to put their money into these money guzzlers.

I believe that there is a call for regulation of gaming machine hours of operation, and over the past years the government and perhaps even this place have been a little lazy in recognising the negative social and family impact these machines are having on vulnerable people within the community. There is no difference between gambling addiction and other addictions. It is all very well for people who have not experienced addiction to say that there is a choice there, but once addiction kicks in choice is taken away and it becomes a form of entrapment for a lot of people. I urge the government to support this bill and to take some steps to regulate the hours of operation of gaming machines.

**The Hon. I.K. HUNTER** secured the adjournment of the debate.