

My name is David Bowles. I am a native Oregonian and have been self-employed since 1978. I currently own a restaurant in Washington County. I have played organized poker for over 35 years.

For the last two years I have played poker a couple nights each week at the Encore Club in Northwest Portland. My wife doesn't mind because it gets me out of her hair and since I play tournaments I never put much money at risk.

In years past, when I played in Vancouver, then La Center and sometimes at Spirit Mountain, I would form acquaintances, but never what I would call friendships. My experiences at Encore Club are markedly different than anything that has occurred before. There is a camaraderie among the players that has allowed real friendships to form. The remarkable thing about this is the diversity of those relationships.

Sometimes I run into customers from my restaurant: engineers, small business owners and Nike employees.

I have become friends with the owner of Encore and we have met outside the club shared stories about the challenges we face as small business owners.

I have become friends with John, who is 80 or so and depends on a motorized scooter that he has fitted with what looks like a seat from a minivan.

Roger and his wife both play. They own a construction company and are opening a sandwich shop in Orenco.

Carl and his wife both play. They are Japanese business owners who sometimes come into the restaurant with their three kids.

Sam is a good player. He is the one who first started calling me Dad, which has become the name that most players know me by. He is a Vietnamese 30-something who works as an investigator at Oregon Child Protective Services.

Gabe and I always visit on breaks when we see each other. He is finishing his PhD in applied neuroscience.

I read Rep Parrish's comparison of poker rooms to hookah lounges. Another legislator was quoted as saying, "Apparently, if you go into them, you would think you were in Las Vegas." These are comments that stand reality on its head. While I sympathize with concerns over video poker and slot machines – I have seen numerous individuals wiped out by this state-run enterprise – I cannot connect the dots between those problems and private poker clubs.

Poker rooms have proliferated because there is a demand for the recreation and social experiences that they provide. In my life, as a mainstream guy from Portland, Oregon, I have never before had the opportunity to engage in relationships with such a diverse group of individuals. Young and old, African and Asian, business owners and students, engineers and cooks. There is quite simply no other opportunity for me to form such connections.

I recognize that there are challenges surrounding the issue of these poker clubs. Many of these challenges can be resolved by addressing the convoluted set of laws and regulations that make the business model vulnerable and the employment practices a bit convoluted. These problems can and should be addressed.

However, it is simply wrong-minded to create law that eliminates these valuable community assets.