



To: Senate Committee for HB2190

May 10, 2017

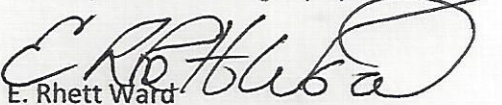
Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, my name is Eddie Rhett Ward. I am here in opposition to HB2190 and to the contradictory and outdated laws that govern social gaming in Oregon. I am a forty year Oregon resident and a thirty year business owner. I am honored to have the opportunity to express my views to this committee. I would like to offer the following points into the record for your consideration:

- In all the argument about “poker” we are forgetting that the “poker” we are talking about is Tournament Texas Holdem, not the poker of the 200 year past history and Hollywood stereotype. Texas-Holdem as a game did not even exist until the 1920s and Tournament Texas Holdem did not get popularized until 2003 when a young accountant named Chris MoneyMaker paid \$35 dollars for a chance to win a seat into the World Series of Poker went on to win the top prize of \$2.5 million. He demonstrated that anyone could win and launched the global phenomenon that Tournament Texas Holdem has become. This global phenomenon and the social gaming that it spawned is huge across the world and postdates most of the laws governing it, especially those in Oregon. One could make the case that Tournament Texas-Holdem could be bigger than the Oregon Lottery if the State supported it with the same kind of legal sanction that California has done. State support could not only encourage small card rooms in small Oregon communities, but could include large ones that rival anything that Las Vegas has to offer. That has certainly been the California result. The tax revenue, employment and subsequent fiscal impact could be huge. This is based on the simple reality that Poker is a game of skill and not like all the other casino games where one competes against the house that always wins. Moreover, Tournament Texas-Holdem is a serious game that will never take root in charity events where the play is anything but serious. That is why it is featured on ESPN,; why it is supported by multiple tour events around the world. It is why cruises feature Texas-Holdem tournaments. It is how Las Vegas can attract over 100,000 people in the 110 degree plus heat of July just to play Tournament Texas-Holdem in the World Series of Poker that is carried on ESPN. An argument could be made that Oregon is foregoing significant economic opportunity by not supporting Tournament Texas-Holdem.
- Social gaming is not going away. The current bill seems to assume that it is somehow better if “legally” relegated from “for profit” businesses to non-profit” charities or fraternal organizations. It is hard to find a logical or economic argument for this assumption other than that such a law would benefit the Washington State casino interests that are working so hard for this passage of HB2190. In fact, if one were to assume that every city in Oregon had a card room and that each employed at least 5-10 people and that they were paid and taxed accordingly, the economic impact could be quite substantial. Moreover, if the Oregon laws were clarified to allow dealers to be paid like any other employee, the same local card rooms could easily employ 10-100 plus per room.

- California has done an excellent job of legislating legal support for Tournament Texas-Holdem. They have avowed that poker passes the “preponderance test” and is therefore a game of skill. That does not mean that luck is not involved, but does mean that poker is not like other casino games where participants play against the house. As a result, California keeps the significant revenue and employment that Tournament Texas-Holdem generates within their state. We all know for a fact that serious Texas Holdem tournament players travel to California and Washington State just for the big tournaments and poker tour events there just like they travel to Las Vegas. Why would Oregon want to let that happen without making an effort to retain both the revenue and the employment opportunities?
- I would like to encourage this committee to address the outdated and contradictory laws that govern social gaming in the State and to do so in such a way that recognizes the unique opportunities that social game represents. This should be a grass roots issue that truly supports the social nature of poker as the name of the “social gaming” implies. In my 71 years I have seen nothing with the social appeal that equals Tournament Texas-Holdem. It is a game that attracts young and old, male and female, all religions and ethnic strata including the physically handicapped where all sit and socialize together in the spirit of open competition. Moreover, while like golf it is a game of skill and strategy, it is unlike golf in that anyone can win. The playing field is truly level. On any given day, it is a game where you can do everything right and lose and do everything wrong and win. Yet, in the longer run the most skilled player will win most often. There is something totally unique here that is not being expressed in the current debate or in the proposed legislation. If one understands the reality of the global phenomenon that Tournament Texas-Holdem is and the universal appeal that it has, why would the State of Oregon not want to be a leader in such enablement for its citizens, especially given that over half the population will be of retirement age in the very near future and need social and competitive pursuits like this that are provided in safe, welcoming environments that are not set up with the sole purpose of taking as much from them as possible? I know of no other game that offers the same level of mental stimulation and social gratification where all are equal and welcomed.

Let me assure you in closing that I am not a gambler. I don't even play the Oregon Lottery. But I love Tournament Texas-Holdem! I think of the \$20-40 typical buy-ins for each poker tournament in the same way that I think of green fees for golf. It is the money that I spend for entertainment. But unlike my golf green fees in Tournament Texas-Holdem the reward for playing well is that you enjoy the experience far longer than a round of golf and with Tournament Texas-Holdem as offered in Oregon card rooms 100% of the buy-in money is returned to the players to reward the quality of their play. I find this game extremely mentally challenging and broadly socially satisfying. I meet and talk with people that I would not otherwise have occasion to sit down with. My purpose today is to encourage you to oppose HB2190 and to modify the current outdated and contradictory laws in such a way as to not just allow but encourage social gaming and especially Tournament Texas-Holdem throughout Oregon.

Thank you for hearing my opinions.



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