

Testimony of Robert Atkinson
May 10, 2017
HB 2190

My name is Robert Atkinson and I am here to testify in opposition to those portions of HB 2190 that would effectively close poker rooms in Oregon. I am a retired lawyer. I worked for almost 10 years in the provision of civil legal services to the poor, including five years as Executive Director of the Marion-Polk Legal Aid service. I then worked for almost 25 years as an Assistant Attorney General in the Appellate Division of the Oregon Department of Justice. For the last several of those years I had the responsibility to oversee the State's practice in the Oregon Supreme Court and, finally, I the honor of defending the Oregon Death With Dignity Act in the United States Supreme Court.

I mention those things only to make it clear that I am a recreational poker player, not a professional poker player or gambler. And I think it is fair to say that many, if not most, of the people with whom I play at the poker clubs in Portland are also recreational players. Many of us are tournament players and you cannot organize a reasonable tournament in a home game setting unless you have a very, very big house and a whole lot of tables and chairs.

The Attorney General's Opinion No. 2010-1 from 2010, with which I assume you are familiar, includes legislative history from the 1970s demonstrating that one of the primary issues driving those legislatures was concern with keeping "big time gambling" out of Oregon. I'm not sure what they or you would consider "big time gambling," but I can assure you that the games currently being played in Portland's poker rooms are not that. This is not the World Series of Poker or the World Poker Tour where large sums of money are at stake. And, of course, poker rooms provide income not only to their operators and the tournament directors and dealers, but also to cooks, waitstaff, bartenders, and clean-up crews.

Finally, I would respectfully ask you to ask yourselves the following question: With the exception of those who are currently profiting from poker, most of whom are in Washington State, who is being hurt by the poker rooms this bill would close? And I respectfully submit that the answer is no one at all.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to be heard.