

EDITORIAL

Op-Ed ; Frank's cards on the table

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Perhaps the biggest government blunders in U.S. history have been prohibitions.

The prohibition against alcohol led to black market smuggling and speakeasies, and reaped huge profits for organized crime. Today, the prohibition on Internet gambling promises to funnel players underground, diminishing society's ability to deal with serious challenges such as underage and problem gambling, and, more importantly, interferes with the right to individual liberty and privacy.

Rep. Barney Frank's (D-Mass.) efforts to deal with this outrageous legislation are heroic.

With the current Internet gambling ban, the unintended consequences abound. Law enforcement and financial institutions must redirect resources to monitor and then block poker wagers instead of focusing resources on tracking terrorist financing. And, because the ban funnels players underground and forces them to use less transparent financial systems to place bets, law enforcement finds itself even more hampered to police potential money laundering.

In addition, reputable sites that use age-verification software are shut out while underground sites that do nothing to prevent minors from playing are favored. Problem gamblers are left as prey for unscrupulous operators that will work outside the law.

Frank has introduced a more sensible solution. His plan creates a licensing and regulating mechanism that will allow us to sort out the most responsible sites - those that are good corporate citizens from those engaged in unscrupulous activities and practices. The legislation also protects minors and problem gamblers while allowing the majority of adults to play poker and other games online.

The truth is that today's technology makes licensing and regulation of Internet gambling possible. Age verification technology tools that exist today to keep kids off of poker sites were non-existent even a decade ago. As a result of these tools, many of the larger operators are able to keep kids off poker sites.

Frank understands that these technological advances enable us to effectively regulate the industry. He also knows that more than 80 countries and jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, are demonstrating how to successfully oversee the industry.

There is another important benefit to this commonsense approach: revenue. An analysis conducted by a leading economist reveals that more than \$4 billion in federal and state revenues could be raised annually if Internet poker were properly regulated and taxed in the United States.

It can be done, and it should be done.

I played poker in college, in law school and later in a local fraternal group on Long Island. After I was elected to Congress, a group of us would get together when we would have late votes on Thursday nights to order takeout food and play. It was a great way to while the time away, have some fun and discuss the events of the day.

Now, I play every Monday night. But many people don't have the opportunity or occasion to meet and play in person. For the 23 million Americans who play poker online, the Internet has provided a forum to socialize and match their skills.

Playing poker online is simply an American tradition evolving into the 21st Century. It is unfathomable that poker, an American pastime and game of true skill, should be banned for the millions who enjoy playing responsibly.

The Poker Players Alliance, with 425,000 members and growing, salutes Congressman Frank for his courage to take on this issue in defense of our individual liberties.

Just as the prohibition of the 1920s failed, so too will today's prohibition of Internet poker. Only meaningful regulation of online poker, like the Frank plan, will produce positive outcomes for the players, children, the economy, the taxpayer, and society in general.

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