

Care to play another hand, Mr. Bond?

Bond is back. Well, almost, and word among California producers is the big deal opening sequence will be a plug for gambling. They say „Casino Royale,“ the about-to-be-remade James Bond movie, will lead with an opening scene of Agent 007 showing off his baccarat skills. Beating arch villain Le Chiffre in a tense duel on the felt is said to be the first time audiences will see Bond show off his skill throwing around the chips. But supposedly, because it's impossible to count cards, Casino Royale is politically correct and shows good money managers are big winners. True to form, however, Bond still orders martinis, shaken not stirred. Local marketing gurus said the Bond brand also still has a hefty punch and targets Las Vegas' ideal demographics.

A recent column item based on conversations with tax reform types talking about Connecticut casinos raised the ire of a bunch of gaming execs. They raised some valid points, including that Connecticut has only two casinos (Nevada has almost 270); Connecticut casinos employ fewer than 15,000 workers (Nevada casinos employ more than 200,000); and Connecticut casinos pay the state nothing on table games, no room tax, no sales tax, no live entertainment tax and no real estate taxes. Unfortunately, they missed a distinction between impact payments and taxation, and the need for an all-cards-on-the-table debate of how to pay for added infrastructure. Noblesse oblige, vous savez.

Speaking of Connecticut, Republican Senate candidate Alan Schlesinger last week admitted he plays blackjack in casinos, an allegation that has been rattling his campaign. Playing blackjack may be OK, but it's also alleged he's lost more than \$ 50,000 at Foxwoods, where it's claimed he's no longer allowed to play, and that he plays under an alias to avoid

detection as an advantage gambler. No laws are alleged to have been broken, but the allegations muddy the waters in an election where Republicans are trying to brand Democrats as pro-gambling. Schlesinger is shooting for the seat held by Democrat Joe Lieberman, who faces a challenge within his own party.

Thanks largely to state regulations that keep the expansion of casinos in check, Standard & Poor's last week predicted the gaming industry will enjoy mid-single-digit growth rates over the rest of 2006. S&P said that was good news, in light of a slowing economy, higher interest rates and energy costs and a moderating housing market. Still, the rate of revenue growth should be expected to slow in coming quarters, its industry report card said. S&P credit analyst Craig Parmelee said gaming should also benefit from continued growth in leisure trends and demographic trends.