

Gambling industry report draws critics' fire

An industry report crediting gambling for creating thousands of jobs and contributing CAD 15.3 billion a year to the economy was dismissed by critics Tuesday, who said the „one-sided“ advertisement fails to account for the social costs of gambling addictions or the lack of new revenue generated by the industry.

The Canadian Gaming Association's report found gambling accounted for 267,000 full-time jobs a year, and said 57 per cent of gambling revenue – CAD 8.7 billion – also supported government services and charities.

The other CAD 6.6 billion went to sustaining operations, paying salaries, purchase goods and services.

But critics dismissed the findings, calling the report „one-sided“ and saying most of the money is recycled and comes from problem gamblers.

„We know that a lot of money changes hands and there's a fair bit of employment and economic revenue from gambling, but the real question is: „Does that offset the social costs; problem gambling first and foremost,“ said Robert Williams, a professor at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta and prominent problem gambling researcher.

The report, he said, also draws „a lot of attention to where the money goes, but they conveniently don't ask where does the money come from.“

„Research that I've done indicates that about a third of all the money comes from problem gamblers. So, yes, a lot of the money goes to good purposes, but is it legitimate to be taking that money from a very small segment of vulnerable people to

serve the greater good?”

Bill Rutsey, president of the Canadian Gaming Association, said the report was important because it represents „the first time ever the national impacts of the industry have been calculated (and) they are quite large and impressive.“

He said gambling is a widely accepted activity, despite the „vocal minority within the population, approximately five per cent, who are opposed to gaming, primarily for moral reasons.“

The association’s research, conducted by HLT Advisory Inc., found 135,000 people are directly employed in the industry, and indirect gambling-related employment such as food and entertainment services swells the total to 267,000 full-time jobs.

For 2006, this translated into CAD 11.6 billion in labour income, the association said.