



## **Racing to conclusions on gambling, school choice and higher wages**

By Jim Waters

It's time to note recent actions that resulted in promoting – and eroding – our freedom.

### **Liberty lover: USA Today's editorial page**

What a difference a year – and a lot of failing schools – makes in turning liberty losers into lovers.

Last year, USA Today's editorial page offered this headline: ["Move beyond vouchers."](#)

Apparently after taking a closer look at just how many students – especially disadvantaged ones – fail to get an adequate education, the paper's editorial board changed its mind and now endorses vouchers and charter schools.

It gets pretty hard to ignore the issue when, as the paper notes, federal measures indicate students at 12,978 U.S. schools are failing to make adequate improvement.

Kentucky's Department of Education reported that a few more students graduated from high school last year. Still, even the department's faulty data indicates rising dropout rates for nearly all ethnic groups, including a sizeable 1.37-percent increase for blacks between 2007 and 2008.

Perhaps Kentucky legislators will muster the courage to match the conclusions reached by USA Today: ["Low-income kids need a chance to succeed. School choice is the most effective way to give it to them."](#)

### **Liberty losers: expanded gaming supporters**

Groups pushing state government to expand gambling by installing "racinos" at horseracing tracks have different wrinkles in their propaganda. The bottom line: Supporters see expanded gambling as a bailout for playing the wrong cards in the past.

For example, track owners claim the deck is stacked against them while competing with other states that use racinos to fatten race purses. Trainers, horses and money go to other states offering more purse money. Churchill Downs shrunk its live racing program from five days to four because it couldn't find horses to fill races.

But instead of going "all in" on a government subsidy, why hasn't the industry put the millions spent lobbying for more gambling into creating fatter purses?

Politicians play the same game. They see the promised \$500 million in additional revenue from racinos as a winning hand for addressing Kentucky's fiscal problems.

Plus, when it comes to "saving" the horse-racing industry, not a single poker face can be found in Frankfort. Emotional arguments abound for "saving" the state's reputation as "the horse capital of the world," as Gov. Steve Beshear described it in a news release.

The governor referenced the 100,000 jobs and \$4 billion economic impact the industry offers and how "we must act quickly to ensure that we maintain that investment in our state."

But shouldn't we feel as bad about having to compete economically at the lowest level by tricking people out of their money and penalizing people who make bad bets?

A good bet: becoming a tax-competitive state like Tennessee, where, according to a new [American Legislative Exchange Report](#), residents earn in 12 months what it takes Kentuckians 13 months to earn.

Becoming addicted to gambling to solve our state's economic woes is like sticking a Band-Aid on an oozing wound or better, like entering a \$5,000 claimer in a stakes race. It's a sucker bet.

### **Liberty lover: Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson**

Whadayaknow?

Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson vetoes bills about as often as professional poker players blink – rarely.

Using his veto power for only the third time in 20 years, Abramson struck down a bill passed by the Metro Council that forced contractors to pay [artificially higher wages on public construction projects](#) that receive at least a half-million dollars in tax money.

The veto was a badly needed blow in behalf of economic liberty in Louisville.

It also took courage for Abramson to make the right decision in the midst of a union stronghold. It would be great if some of his buddies in Frankfort would follow suit.

— *Jim Waters is director of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Reach him at [jwaters@freedomkentucky.com](mailto:jwaters@freedomkentucky.com). Read previously published columns at [www.bipps.org](http://www.bipps.org).*