

## Huntington Herald-Dispatch, June 23, 2008

*Editorial: West Virginia must break its reliance on gambling revenue*

Among the 50 states, only Nevada state government relies more on lottery revenue than West Virginia does.

**According to a study released Thursday by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, revenue from lottery games accounted for about 8.9 percent of West Virginia's internal state government revenues, topped only by Nevada's 13.4 percent. By comparison, Ohio gambling revenues accounted for 1.9 percent of its own-source revenue. In Kentucky, the number was 1.5 percent.**

Was this what West Virginians expected when they voted back in the 1980s to authorize a state lottery selling scratch-off tickets? Probably not.

The numbers provide evidence of what many have suspected: The biggest gambling addict in West Virginia is state government. It cannot put that genie back in the bottle, even if it wanted to. The state relies too heavily on gambling

Gambling in West Virginia pays for senior citizen programs, college scholarships and many other things. But this revenue stream is sensitive to what happens in other states, especially Pennsylvania,

which is adding table game casinos similar to those here.

**The numbers used in the Rockefeller Institute report predated the arrival of table games such as blackjack and poker at West Virginia's race tracks.**

Revenue from table games could make West Virginia that much more dependent on gambling to provide basic government services or to pay off unfunded liabilities in pensions and other future obligations.

That's why it's so important for legislators to be very careful of how they proceed with any expansion or contraction of gambling. Being so dependent on gambling is not a good situation to be in.

Gambling revenues should be used for one-time needs or to pay off long-term debt. They should not be used for continuing programs that must be funded every year. The only exceptions would be the PROMISE scholarship program, which is specifically funded by video lottery, and long-term debt financed by bonds backed by gambling revenue.

West Virginia must find other ways to support the state budget so a downturn in the gambling industry does not damage the state government's ability to operate.