

Snake Eyes

Steve Beshear's economic platform isn't a gamble, it's a charade

"The people of Kentucky are not dumb."

—Steve Beshear, Democratic nominee for governor

Steve Beshear has made a lot of promises. Better roads, better education, better health care. A 21st Century Economy!

He plans to pay for it all with casino gambling.

Governor Ernie Fletcher, aware of voters' antipathy toward big casinos and even more aware of his own floundering campaign, has attempted to turn the gubernatorial race into a referendum on this single issue.

Faced with withering attacks, Fletcher sidesteps discussion of indictments and corruption and instead attacks the cornerstone of Beshear's economic platform.

It's one of the few valid points Mr. Fletcher is able to make these days.

"It's hard to tell the people of Kentucky that you're for all these values," the Governor said during their debate last month, "when you want to bring in casino gambling which means they have to lose \$1.5 billion dollars so you can have your money."

"Well as you can tell from the way your campaign is going," Beshear fired back, "the people kinda look at my values and say I'm like them, and they don't accept your values."

But Steve Beshear is telling only half the truth. Voters aren't flocking to him because they agree with him—we just don't have any other choice.

It's a sad State of affairs.

Promise the Moon

Citing poll numbers, Beshear mocks Ernie Fletcher's campaign with relish.

Some polls show a full quarter of the state's Republicans are planning to vote against their own candidate along with 60 percent of independents. The only age group Fletcher seems prepared to carry are those 60 and over.

To create a 21st Century economy, Beshear says, Kentucky must invest in its people. He pledges to enhance education and provide affordable health care "to all Kentucky families." He says he will create jobs, fix roads.

"But how do we pay for those things?" he asks rhetorically in policy statements.

He explains that simply cutting government waste and increasing revenue will not be enough. "We need another revenue source," he says.

Read Steve Beshear's lips.

"Each year over 550,000 Kentuckians travel across our borders to spend over a billion of their entertainment dollars at gaming facilities in states like Indiana, Illinois and West Virginia," he says. "Right now those Kentucky dollars are educating Indiana children, paving Illinois roads and lowering health care costs for West Virginia families. I want to keep those dollars here in Kentucky



Photo by David Schankula

so we can make investments that our people need—without raising taxes."

And there's the rub, pretty as it might sound.

Educating children, paving roads, and paying for health care. These are all traditional platforms of the American left. They are services of the government, they are the end result of a caring society and a community ethic.

Steve Beshear pledges to do all this without raising taxes. He promises to do it with gambling.

What's the difference?

Of course, Mr. Beshear doesn't call it gambling. He chose a lighter term. He stands for expanded "gaming." He says we need "a governor who will bet on Kentucky's future."

But it's called a gamble for a reason and Kentuckians don't seem to be playing along.

Beshear claims half a million Kentuckians routinely travel across state

lines to gamble their money for our neighbors' benefit. Legalizing casinos, he argues, will stop this illicit traffic of lost dollars.

It's a duplicitous sort of reasoning.

Rather than raise taxes to provide government services and grow the economy, Steve Beshear wants to create the illusion of entertainment.

Mr. Beshear argues that home-grown casinos will generate the money to buttress his political promises. He argues that Kentuckians will gladly give their money to the local casino and that this revenue will save the state's citizens the burden of higher taxes.

But it all adds up to the same thing. It is fuzzy math.

For Beshear's gambling plan to work, we the people would have to approve it in a statewide referendum next year.

keeping it to himself.

He's already pledged not to raise taxes and he pledged it because he's counting on this unofficial tax, this "gaming" he's pretending to play.

Guest Opinion by David Schankula

Vote for Yourself

So what's the answer? Stuck between a vote for a con-man and a vote for a fraud, what are we left with?

Quite simply, the truth. Gambling is not a bad way to raise money. Our horse industry

The same poll Mr. Beshear bludgeoned the Governor with should serve as a stark warning.

Conducted at the behest of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and WTVQ-36, Democrats comprised a clear majority of the respondents.

Yet still, it is the one issue in which Fletcher defeats Beshear. Half the state's population are opposed to the influx of casino gambling. Another 10 percent are unconvinced.

That leaves Beshear's economic platform little room for success—and that means his entire campaign is built on a yet-to-be broken promise.

But even if this Constitutional amendment did pass, would Kentucky's casinos produce the revenue Mr. Beshear projects? Again the poll Beshear cites undercuts his argument.

Nearly three-fourths of the state's citizens have *never* even been to a casino. Will a quarter of the population really supply all this money, or do we simply turn the state into a three million member Gamblers Anonymous?

Without gambling, Steve Beshear has no plan to pave our roads, to better our schools, or to insure our uninsured. Or if he does, he's

needs and requires government support, tax breaks and incentives. Expanded gaming could be a part of such initiatives. In fact, casinos could provide a strong complement to a sound economic plan for the future.

There is a perfectly good argument to be made for expanded gaming but Steve Beshear has not made it.

He has promised the moon and he has no backup plan, no exit strategy. It is all he has.

It is easy to propose quick fixes. It is simple to say how things should be. But it is difficult to produce big ideas, it is hard work creating sound policy. It is difficult standing up for what you believe in.

Or at least, it is if you are Steve Beshear.

If you are a voter, if you are member of this Commonwealth, you deserve more. ■

David Schankula, a Lexington native, is "tired of politicians who are afraid to at least believe in themselves." He can be reached at david@lexiconproject.com and encourages everyone to join the much larger discussion at www.bluegrassroots.org