

Ferdie J. Deering

Money in Gambling, Not Horses

WATCHING horse races must not be much fun. It is perfectly legal in Oklahoma to compare the speed of different horses, but that doesn't seem to be what the horse owners and fans are interested in.

Nobody even bothers to report attendance at race tracks where there is no gambling, which is illegal in Oklahoma. Attendance at tracks where betting is allowed is tabulated just as carefully as if it were a football game or some other important event. The big money is in gambling; not in the horses, many of which couldn't head a steer in a corral with the gate shut.

That's why the proposal is often made in Oklahoma to legalize gambling. The proposal may be stated to "legalize horse racing," but that's misleading. Horse racing is legal in this state and never has been illegal. They mean gambling.

Big time syndicates, politicians, professional gamblers, assorted touts and peculiar characters are anxious for Oklahoma to legalize gambling. They figure a lot of people here are gullible and ready to be fleeced. That might be so.

The question will be on the ballot Aug. 27, proposing county option elections to allow pari-mutuel betting at county fairs. The strategy is to break the election down to county units, then spend whatever is necessary to get the two or three tracks they want.

A few weeks ago, Texans voted down a proposal to legalize pari-mutuel gambling on horse races by a 3

to 2 margin, although promoters spent more than \$250,000 on their campaign. They claimed public morals had changed, but after the election, they accused church people of "trying to impose their moral beliefs on generations of Texans to come."

Thus promoters of legalized gambling admit there is a serious question of morality involved, even though it doesn't inhibit them.

Because there is no specific biblical injunction against gambling, churches have not agreed on the moral implications of the habit. Bingo is conducted regularly by a few denominations to raise money, although there is no biblical direction for that, either. Most churches condemn gambling because it feeds on avarice and greed, and tends to be associated with other vices.

I almost bet on a horse race myself once. A few years ago, on a plane to Washington, I happened to sit by Ed Barth. He was headed for Louisville to see the Kentucky Der-

by. He told me about the horses, including an entry named Gaylord. Finally, I gave him \$2 to bet on Gaylord, figuring that if the horse was anything like EKG I couldn't lose and that wouldn't really be gambling.

The horse was scratched and Ed brought my \$2 back to me. That's better than most gamblers fare.

Another time, I shivered in the stands at Louisville on a rainy day with a few score horse lovers watching the qualifying trials. Beneath the stands, sipping mint juleps and gambling, were thousands more who paid no attention to the horses, except on the scoreboard.

From that and other observations, I am convinced that racing fans aren't really cheering either the horse or the jockey when they yell "Come on!" as the bangtails come flying down the stretch. They're really yelling for their money, and most of them don't get it.

Gambling Blasted

TO THE EDITOR:

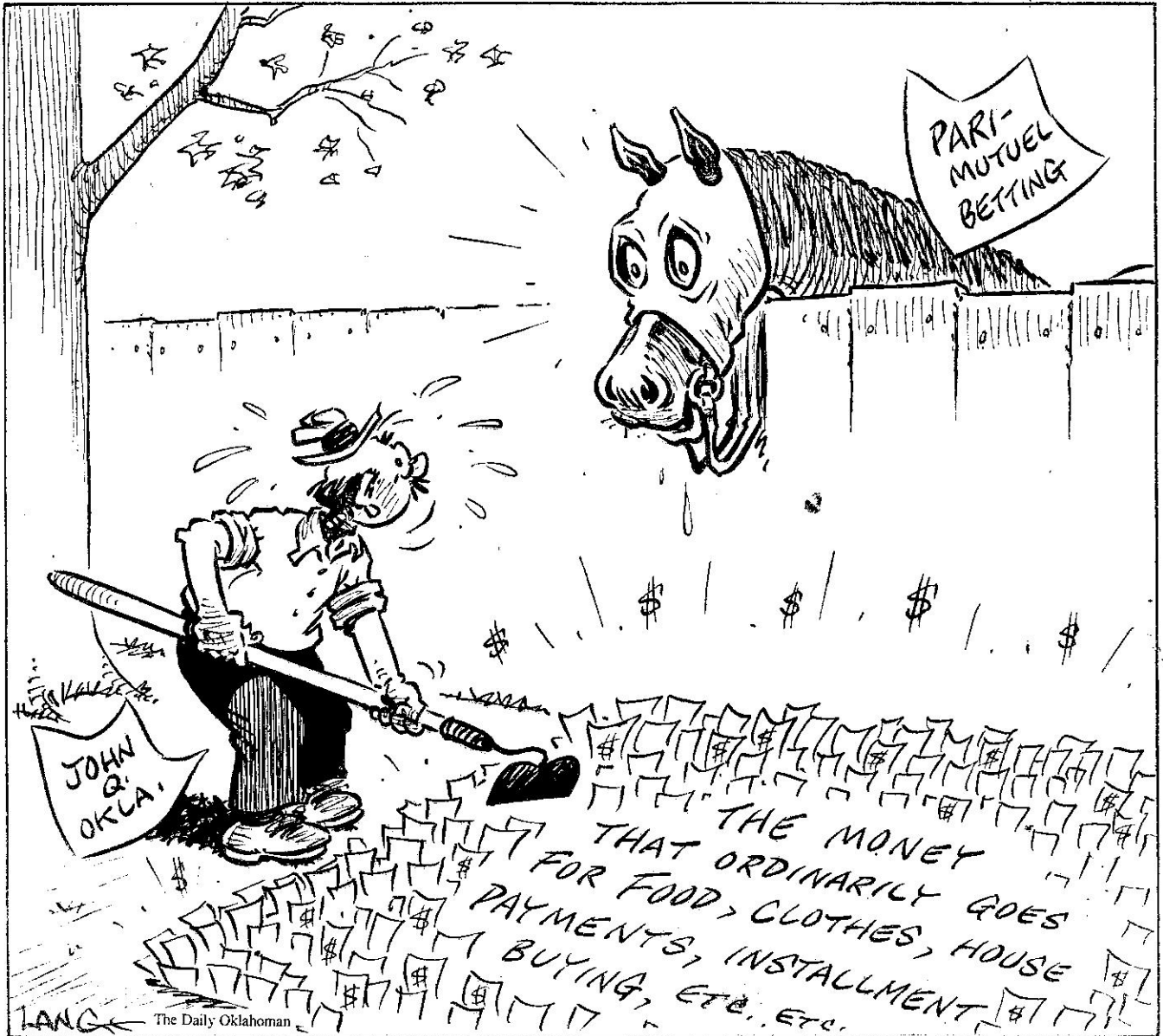
We appreciate your printing Ferdie J. Deering's article in the June 21 Oklahoman entitled "Money in Gambling, Not Horses." I was glad to see someone brave enough to tell the truth about problems which come along when states introduce pari-mutuel gambling—especially crime.

Oklahoma started with a horse race—let's not foul it up with pari-mutuel gambling (one can race horses legally right now in Oklahoma). Oklahoma leads the country in horse breeding. Let's keep it that way by keeping pari-mutuel gambling and organized crime out.

R. Dulaney Barrett, Bethany

'What's the Matter? - Don't You Like Horses?'

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