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May 4, 2010

The Honorable Larry Taylor  
Chair, House of Representatives Republican Caucus  
The Honorable Garnet Coleman  
Chair, Legislative Study Group  
The Honorable Wayne Christian  
President, Texas Conservative Coalition  
Post Office Box 2910  
State Capitol Building  
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Representatives:

There is an elephant in the room these days - gambling. We all know we are headed for an enormous deficit next session, and various groups are working behind the scenes for and against gambling. The options being advocated quietly are wide in range, but the issue is really not being given the public vetting that it deserves, especially given the enormous fiscal and social implications for our state.

Speaker Straus has committed to remaining uninvolved in the process because of his conflict of interest. This position is as it should be, and he is simply complying with his written pledge. But since the Speaker has a conflict, he is unable to act on this issue. There is not even an interim charge that directly or indirectly relates to the potential of gaming in Texas – in either standing committee charges or in the several select committees he has created.

The danger of this dynamic is that while the House does no research and holds no hearings on this issue, various industry and interest groups and their lobbyists are mobilizing now in order to pass or resist a gambling expansion next session. House members will be at a disadvantage if we do not do our own homework in advance.

In the 81st session, an overwhelming and bipartisan majority of the House voted to give this issue the serious consideration it deserves. HCR 220, by Kuempel, among other things called on "the lieutenant governor and speaker of the house of representatives to create a joint interim committee to study the gaming industry in Texas and its potential direct and indirect economic impact on specific markets and on the state as a whole..." This measure passed the House on a 98-36 vote, then died in the Senate for lack of time. The will of the House is clearly for this issue to be studied, and our constituents are owed more than us just waiting for the inevitable issue to arise in January 2011 with no prior comprehensive study of the issue.

Therefore, I am asking that you join with me in establishing a bi-partisan ad hoc committee to fully explore all aspects of any and all gaming proposals that might be before the Texas House during the upcoming 82nd Legislative Session.

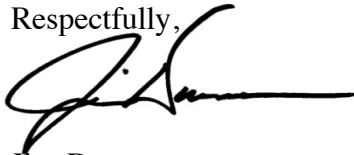
I intend to ask a number of members of the House Democratic Caucus to serve on this committee and would hope that the House Republican Caucus would join in selecting an equal number of its members to serve. In addition to the official House caucuses, it would seem that additional diversity in perspective could be obtained by affording the two largest House policy caucuses, the Legislative Study Group and the Texas Conservative Coalition, to also select an equal number of their members to participate.

This would be a committee jointly governed by all entities who choose to participate and would proceed under the rules of the House. My purpose is to have full and diverse participation, and the direction determined in a bi-partisan and issue-neutral manner. We need to publicly vet this issue, hear from all sides, determine all pros and cons, and do so without preconceived opinion or agenda. If one or more of these entities choose not to participate, then I would propose that those participating increase their membership so we have no less than 12 total House members serving on the final panel. The possibility of each group selecting a public member might be discussed if beneficial. The above is just a framework proposal to get things started.

Since our situation is so unique, in that Speaker Straus can neither initiate nor opine regarding this subject, we must take it on ourselves, as leaders of the two political caucuses and the two largest policy caucus in the House, to assure this important issue is given the interim consideration it would receive under normal circumstances.

My hope is that the committee would begin work no later than June, so if your organization wishes to participate, please let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss logistical and procedural issues. If you have any suggestions whatsoever, please advise. This issue needs a non-biased review, and I hope you will participate in that review. I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Dunnam", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Dunnam

cc: Members of the Texas House of Representatives