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**GAMBLING: THE PURPLE ISSUE OF 2004**

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# **GAMBLING: THE PURPLE ISSUE OF 2004**

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## **Gambling: The Purple Issue of 2004**

What do Woodward County in Oklahoma, Collier County in Florida, Sarpy County in Nebraska, and Scott County in Virginia have in common? Similarly, what do Tompkins County in New York, Marin County in California, King County in Washington, and Wayne County in Michigan have in common?

The answer comes from the general election of 2004, and it might come as a surprise to some. Woodward, Collier, Sarpy, and Scott all voted overwhelmingly for President Bush but also voted to expand gambling in their areas. Tompkins, Marin, King and Wayne all voted in huge numbers for Senator Kerry and then voted against expanding gambling.

The question of expansion of gambling simply was not the moral issue that it might have been in the past. Even in the most red of pro-Bush states, there was significant support for gambling. In the most pro-Kerry blue states, there was considerable opposition to gambling. It was the true purple issue of 2004.

Take a look at Oklahoma. President Bush was overwhelmingly elected by a margin of greater than 30 percentage points. Similarly, a measure to introduce the lottery to Oklahoma and a proposal to expand gambling at Indian casinos and to bring racinos to the State's racetracks both passed easily. In Woodward County, President Bush won with nearly 81% of the vote; racinos passed with 58% of the vote. Woodward was hardly an isolated example. In Ellis, Dewey, and Canadian Counties, President Bush won with in excess of 75% of the vote, and the racino measure prevailed easily in each county. In fact, while President Bush won each of Oklahoma's 77 counties, the racino measure passed in 74 of the counties.

In Florida, President Bush won by a 5% margin, and an initiative to bring seven racinos to southeastern Florida also prevailed. In Collier County – in southwestern Florida away from the proposed racino sites - President Bush won with 65.63% of the vote, and the racinos also prevailed with over 53% of the vote. Similar results held true for Lee County (the Fort Myers area) where the President won 60.4% of the vote, and the racino measure also prevailed.

In Nebraska, the President prevailed by 34 percentage points, and a measure to bring two casinos to Omaha and 4,900 electronic gaming devices statewide narrowly failed. Again, many of the areas that backed the President strongly also voted to expand gambling. 69% of Sarpy County, outside Omaha, voted for the President, and the county voted to support Initiative 420 with 53% of the vote. Similar results occurred in Gage and Douglas Counties where the President won easily, and gambling expansion also won.

In Scott County in Virginia, the President won with 65% of the vote, and a ballot measure to bring OTB to the county was also successful. Similarly in two other Virginia

Counties that voted for the President (Henry and Westmoreland Counties), the voters chose to bring OTB into their localities.

The Blue areas of the country seemed, by contrast, to oppose much of the gambling agenda. Tompkins County in upstate New York, the home of Cornell University, voted for Kerry by a margin of 2-1 and voted against OTB by a similar margin.

In California, which Senator Kerry won with a 10% margin, two propositions that would have expanded gambling were crushed at the polls. Proposition 70 which would have expanded Indian gaming lost a by a whopping 76% to 24%. Proposition 68 which would have authorized expanded gambling at racetracks and card rooms failed by an even larger margin of 83.7% to 16.3%. In no county in California did this proposition receive more than 20% of the vote. In archetypically liberal Marin County, where 73% of the voters supported Senator Kerry, Proposition 68 won only 10% of the vote.

The blue state of Washington saw an initiative to add electronic gaming machines to non-tribal locations fail by 20 percentage points. In King County (the Seattle area) which voted for Kerry with 65.5% of the vote, the initiative received only 33% of the vote. The result was similar in Jefferson County which voted 63.2% for Kerry and 35.16% for the initiative. The pro-gaming initiative was successful in only five of Washington's 39 counties, and four of these five counties voted in support of President Bush.

Michigan voted to support Senator Kerry and also in support of a constitutional amendment which would require a referendum before casino gambling could be expanded. This referendum makes it especially hard to add racinos or electronic gaming devices. Wayne County supported Senator Kerry with 69% of the vote and then voted for the measure to restrict gambling with 61.8% of the vote. Of the two counties in Michigan that voted to prevent the additional restriction on gambling, one voted for President Bush, and one supported Senator Kerry.

In short, if you think the 2004 election was about traditional moral values, you can't prove it by the gambling votes. Many blue areas voted against gambling, and many red areas voted for gambling. Maybe the whole country has followed the example of virtues guru William Bennett, who was found to have lost millions of dollars at video poker. It just might be the case that opposition to gambling is no longer part of this nation's traditional moral values. Gambling is now a purple issue. It doesn't belong to any of the parties.