
Editorial Comments on the Lottery in North Carolina Newspapers

While most newspaper editorials published in North Carolina newspapers oppose a state lottery, a few are favorable, and some straddle the fence. Here are excerpts, pro, con, and neutral, from Tar Heel editorial pages.

For

“Decisions on gambling—whether it’s a lottery, a poker game, or a sporting event—should be made by individuals, not by state lawmakers. Lawmakers are sent to Raleigh to preserve our freedoms, not to make moral decisions for individuals.”

—*The Gaston Gazette*,
Gastonia, N.C., May 25, 1997

“That people who can’t really afford tickets will buy them is the most compelling argument against lotteries. But most people in the United States have some discretionary spending money—they buy soft drinks, go to movies, buy CDs or make other non-essential purchases. For many people, buying lottery tickets is a form of recreation, one where about 34 percent of the purchase price. . . . would go toward education and other state programs from which they and other state residents would benefit.”

—*The Asheville Citizen-Times*,
Asheville, N.C., February 19, 1999

“[I]f the lottery bill passes the Legislature and goes on to passage in referendum, so be it. The people will have spoken, and the people will get a lottery to compete with those in Virginia, Georgia and other neighboring states.”

—*The Herald Sun*,
Durham, N.C., April 28, 1997

Against

“Why is a stance against the lottery the most favorable to working people and families? First, the lottery is a fool’s bargain: The odds against someone hitting it big are tremendous. Second, those who play the lottery most often tend to be people who can least afford it, but who are banking on a jackpot to make them rich. . . . Third, with the advertising and promotion needed to get folks interested, the state in effect becomes a deceptive agent of gambling—hardly a role any state should play. Fourth, the promises to devote lottery proceeds to noble efforts in education sound good—but they are not as reliable as old-fashioned but steady revenues from equitable taxes on all citizens. Fifth, all too often, the lottery proceeds that were to be a bonus become a substitute for needed appropriations, and a way for lawmakers to avoid politically unpopular tax increases.”

—*The News & Observer*,
Raleigh, N.C., March 17, 1999

“Letting voters decide the issue may sound like democracy in action. But it’s really political gutlessness. We elect people to represent us, study the issues, debate them and make a thoughtful decision. When they punt the ball to the voters—most of whom haven’t studied the issue and many of whom will likely be swayed by TV commercials—they shrug off their responsibilities.”

—*Morning Star*,
Wilmington, N.C., Feb. 12, 1999

Against

"North Carolina does not need a gigantic, state-sponsored media campaign urging the poor and unsophisticated to tie their futures to chance. The best way to assure that such a campaign will not hit the North Carolina air waves is to assure that there is no lottery to advertise."

—*Winston-Salem Journal*,
Winston-Salem, N.C., Feb. 12, 1999

"Maybe we're old-fashioned, but we reject the idea that the relationship between government and citizens should be that of hustler to sucker. Politically, a lottery may be an idea whose time is soon to come. That doesn't make it a good idea."

—*The Charlotte Observer*,
Charlotte, N.C., March 8, 1999

transit or social services," Allen writes. "If the funds are able to be held within the education budget, they become a convenient source for financing recurrent costs, such as salaries. The degree to which lottery monies are available for such purposes is a function of the specificity of laws and statutes which govern the use of lottery funds."²⁸

When spending needs for program areas earmarked for lottery funds continue to rise, or when spending within the program area actually drops following the institution of a lottery, public cynicism about the lottery is likely to follow. Such has been the case in Florida, where citizens were initially persuaded to vote for the lottery on the promise that it would enhance funding of public education. However, a 1998 study of Florida's funding of public schools by the *Palm Beach Post* found that the state now spends 35 cents on the state tax dollar for education compared to 40 cents out of each dollar before the lottery was instituted.²⁹

Neutral

"If the majority of voters want it, they should have it. What they should *not* do is vote for it blindly, assuming that it's a pie-in-the-sky scheme that (1) hurts nobody and (2) will do good works forever and ever. The first is demonstrably untrue, and the second is questionable."

—*Fayetteville Observer-Times*,
May 7, 1997

"... Our system of government is supposed to be by, for and of the people. The lottery debate is one of those things, of many, that the majority should be allowed to decide. Give both sides a chance to air their views, and then let the final question rest with the people."

—Tom Joyce (signed editorial),
The Mount Airy News,
December 29, 1998

"When the lottery was inaugurated in 1988, we were led to believe that it would be used to *enhance* and *supplement* public education monies," says John Ryor, executive director of the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA. "Instead, lottery funds have been used to supplant normal appropriations going to education. . . . They've made some feeble efforts to restore general revenue funding, but it's tough in this environment of 'no new taxes.' If you don't have specific language that prevents it, the legislature will rob Peter to pay Paul in an instant."

A 1996 study by *Money* magazine found that state spending dedicated to education remained relatively unchanged from 1990 to 1995—about 50 percent for lottery states and 60 percent for non-lottery states—despite the growth in lottery revenues. North Carolina will spend approximately 60 percent of general fund revenues in the 1999–2000 fiscal year on public schools, community colleges, and universities, according to the Fiscal