



Friday, 9 December 2011

Open Letter to Tim Costello from AHA (NSW) President Scott Leach

Dear Mr Costello,

In the last 24 hours public debate in this country has descended to an appalling level not seen in years.

To be attacking Father Chris Riley – a man whose character and integrity are beyond measure – just because he takes a stand opposing your own on how to help problem gamblers is, quite frankly, a disgrace.

Father Chris is not a man on your large executive salary of \$255,000, but is out on the street day after day helping the youth of Australia.

To attack him for taking charity donations from the hotel and club industries to help people in need when you have done exactly the same is rank hypocrisy.

At the same time you have demonised the entire hotel industry - an industry on which 17,000 community and sporting groups rely on for support in NSW alone.

You are encouraging us not to donate, not to contribute, not to be part of the community at the very time when the community needs it most.

By implication you are attacking the local footy club who gets their local hotel to pay for their footy gear, or the local branch of the SES that relies on their local hotel to buy new equipment.

What's wrong with that? How is that encouraging people to gamble?

What frustrates me – and others – is that I assume you are following the old political adage, 'make people afraid of it, tell them who to blame for it.'

You are gambling a little yourself Tim, by claiming that the \$537,000 you accepted from the AHA in 2005 wasn't from the actual organisation – but from employees only. You know and I know hoteliers who operate gaming machines proudly donated to your organisation. This is a slap in the face to publicans.

Tim, if you are a man of principle you have two choices:

1. Retract your criticism of Father Chris Riley and apologise.

2. Repay the \$537,000 – I am willing to be reasonable, you can pay it back in instalments over five years and it will be placed into our Foundation for further charitable donations from people happy to accept it.

I am tired of having this industry demonised by bleeding-heart do-gooders with their elitist views on how other people should spend their time and their money.

Yes, there is an issue with problem gambling, as Father Riley readily admits and as pubs and clubs have been saying, but giving problem gamblers a card to gamble is not the way to help them.

It is merely a weak prop to a weak Government demanded by a weak man who got 14,000 votes and now wants to hold the country to ransom.

Rest assured Mr Costello, hotels and clubs will continue the fight against mandatory pre-commitment, the nanny-state mentality and prohibition by stealth.

We did not seek or provoke this assault on our business.

We did not expect or invite a confrontation with this Federal Government.

This is a time for the united industry to draw the line.

We will do what is right.

We will we do what is hard.

And we will proudly continue to support great people like Father Chris Riley.

Regards,

AHA (NSW) President Scott Leach

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