

Making Haste to be Rich

“He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.” (Proverbs 28:20) I don’t know if the truth of this proverb has ever been proven more succinctly than it has been during the events of the past two weeks in the state of Alabama. On Tuesday, March 30, the Alabama state Senate voted by a three-fifths majority to approve an amendment to the state Constitution which would legalize bingo slot machines within the state. Just two days later, the FBI shocked the entire state when they announced that they had significant evidence of corruption in regards to that proposed amendment... What..? You weren’t shocked? Not even a little bit? Oh... Well... um... Let’s see... The entire state was at least shocked that it took a whole two days for the FBI to make their announcement. In all seriousness though, no one can honestly deny that gambling and corruption go hand in hand, and our Senate has simply provided one more piece in a huge mountain of evidence of the evils of gambling.

The FBI probe will most likely destroy any chance that the House of Representatives would approve the Bingo bill, but just in case it doesn’t, I would like to draw your attention to a very important point of law that Senator Erwin briefly mentioned during the debate over this bill. Shortly before the bill was put to a vote, Sen. Erwin announced that Sen. Hank Sanders should not be permitted to vote since he had a vested interest in the measure. Lt. Gov. Folsom was quick to defend Sen. Sanders’ vote, but in so doing, he and Sen. Sanders both violated their oath to uphold the Constitution of this great state.

Section 82 of the Constitution of the State of Alabama states that:

A member of the legislature who has a personal or private interest in any measure or bill proposed or pending before the legislature, shall disclose the fact to the house of which he is a member, and shall not vote thereon.

According to the Constitution, therefore, Sen. Sanders was required to publicly announce to the Senate that he is currently contracted as the attorney for the Eatman Alumni Association, that he is currently assisting them in establishing a large bingo hall in Greene County and that the terms of his contract state that he will not receive any payment for his services unless and until that bingo hall becomes operational. In other words, Sen. Sanders will gain a lot of money if the bingo bill is passed into law and lose a lot of money if it does not pass. That certainly counts as a personal interest in the bill and provides undeniable grounds for him to abstain from voting.

Clearly, Lt. Gov. Folsom should have agreed with Sen. Erwin instead of dismissing his comments as being irrelevant. Sen. Sanders’ association with the Eatman Alumni Association was a matter of public record, and has been known to the Senate since he assisted the association in acquiring their bingo license back in 2008. Why, then, was the Lt. Gov. so quick to dismiss Sen. Erwin’s request? There can only be one reason. The Lt. Gov. must have realized that without Sen. Sanders’ vote, the bill would not have achieved the three-fifths majority necessary for the Constitution to be amended.

Sen. Erwin seems to be content to let the matter lie for now, but I would not be surprised at all to hear murmurs of impeachment begin to rumble out from under the doors of the Senate chambers. “He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent,” but the proverb doesn’t end there. It goes on to say that “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.” While I do not wish poverty on any man, I must admit that in this case, I would find it to be very justly deserved.