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An Immodest Proposal

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Dear Governor _____:

A convergence of public events and important issues has led my wife and me to the discovery of a fabulous new concept which we would like to propose to you as a distinct benefit to the elderly of this state, to the health-care system and insurance companies, and to the state's dwindling tax coffers.

Background 1:

My wife and I are nearing retirement age and have therefore become concerned with "senior" issues. For one thing, we have noted with some curiosity (and distress) that our local senior centers routinely offer junkets to local gambling spots (such as Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun) where you can throw \$10 in quarters into a slot machine in less than five minutes and thereby quickly devastate any inheritance your undeserving children or grandchildren might have otherwise tried to squeeze out of you.

We have also noticed that many of these casinos go to astonishing lengths to create a virtual-reality atmosphere to attract customers. We saw a recent news report, for example, on a Las Vegas casino that went to considerable trouble and study to reproduce an Afghanistan sunset as realistically as possible. Since we haven't been to this Las Vegas desert gambling paradise, we don't know if the simulation includes the sounds of automatic-weapons fire and exploding Buddhas or not. But the point is that today's casino builders construct their enterprises around some THEME that will attract customers to grind away at the same slots or tumble dice on the same tables they could find in any Nevada truck stop.

Summary A : Senior gambling junkets; theme casinos.

Background 2:

As you are well aware, and as fistfights on the floor of our legislature have shown, one of the most pressing senior-citizen issues is the high cost of — some say "drugs," some say "prescription drugs," some say "life-maintaining medications," some say "pharmaceuticals." Who can forget the indelible images (in a recent newscast) of American seniors being manacled and tossed into the backs of stockade trucks like so many hoof-and-mouth-diseased cattle simply for being caught in the possession of pharmaceuticals purchased across the border in Canada? Or the tragic spectacle of the "Bonnie and Clyde Seniors" (as dubbed by the youth-loving media) who threw their guns in the faces of pharmacist after pharmacist across the country as they emptied out, not the cash boxes, but the stocks of hypertension-reducing, cholesterol-reducing, calcium-building, hormone-enhancing, and other presumably legal drugs made prohibitive by ever more towering costs?

Summary B : Clearly it is not in the interests of this state or any other — is it, Governor? — to pack ever more billions into the coffers of the fat-cat pharmaceutical makers while we turn a whole class of retirement-age citizens (and voters) into paupers and bandits? Or is the secret plan to pack the jails with elders precisely so they cannot vote? Governor?

Background 3:

Some insurance companies and corporations with health-benefit payout programs have instituted their own pharmacies (e.g., General Motors and Unicare, among many others). They create savings both by BUYING IN BULK and offering GENERIC substitutes for more costly brand-name drugs whenever reasonable and approved by the attending physician.

Summary 3: Bulk buying saves. (What's good for GM . . .)

THEREFORE,

Your Honor, we propose the establishment of SENIOR GAMBLING CASINOS in which seniors with prescriptions in hand could go to GAMBLE FOR DRUGS. As in ordinary casinos, these senior gambling centers would have slot machines, but each machine would be identified by a payoff medication. A bank of machines, for example, might be identified to pay off in Zestrol®, say, or Norvasc®, or Lipitor® or Zocor®, or a host of others. We anticipate the Viagra® slots would generate particularly impressive income.

Obviously, some of the details would have to be worked out. My wife thought the Viagra® payoff should be identified by three tits, but I feel that this is a bit sexist and would prefer the shape of the drug to be the indicator of a windfall--three blue diamonds in this case. My own personal experience with Zestrol® would suggest that the payoff symbol should be werewolves, since I felt like a werewolf after taking the drug for only a few days. But let us not be distracted by side effects. Surely we can safely leave matters of this stripe to those savvy market analysts who bring us such potent advertising images as a white-haired couple blasting down the highway in a big convertible swilling a healthful chocolate drink and towing an ecology can.

Clearly, Your Honor, the time is ripe for turning the senior gambling craze and the high cost of prescription drugs into an income, tax, and vote producing enterprise that will also reduce the soaring rate of senior crime. Pharmaceutical theme casinos with prescription drug payoffs are clearly the wave of the immediate future. We hope you act at once to stimulate the legislature to provide appropriate laws to make such beneficial enterprises possible.

And if, in the difficult battle ahead with the non-visionaries in our government, you find yourself developing an ulcer or high blood pressure, muscular pain or recurring headaches, flaking skin, poor circulation, calcium loss, respiratory difficulties, night sweats or nightmares or any other signs of stress and aging, we can only hope these will remind you of the urgency, justice, and humanity of our cause.

Yours for good health and good luck,

Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth Dime