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[Guest Viewpoint: Addicted gamblers have hope](http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/opinion/7192929-47/story.csp)

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BY JULIE HYNES AND PAT KELLISON

When times are tough, as they are right now for all too many of us, sometimes one of the only things we have left to cling to is hope. Sometimes we cling to a means of escape. And sometimes we cling to both.

In Oregon's toughest economic crisis in memory, the state is in a position where it must preserve what is left of its ability to maximize revenue. You may have seen recent ads encouraging a "knight of fun" with the video lottery, or inviting you to play a new raffle game. Ads such as these are a direct response to the economic crisis that has left us wondering how we will pay for Oregon's necessities.

The state of Oregon relies on the lottery revenue for almost 10 percent of the entire general fund budget. Lottery revenues contribute more to the state budget than corporate taxes. Are the resources without risk? Of course they aren't.

A 2007 Oregon study says one in 37 residents has a gambling problem, and those problems affect at least six to 12 others. If you haven't yet run across a problem gambler, consider yourself one of a few.

An overwhelming majority (about 90 percent) of problem gamblers in gambling treatment last year were hooked on video poker or video "line games," which were introduced in 2005 to help boost state revenue. Half of problem gamblers (48 percent) said they seriously contemplated suicide, that number was way up from just the year before.

So much for hope.

That's the hard news. I'd like to share a story from Pat Kellison, a recovering gambler who has another angle. She wanted to share this open letter to her gambling. It's titled "Goodbye, Gambling, Goodbye":

"I thought you were my friend. When I was down and out, lonely or blue, I always sought my friend — you. You were always there for me:— bright lights, long nights, fun games and an immersion in the sights that made me forget my fears, provoked laughter instead of tears and

numbed my brain from all the pain.

“I was so in awe of you that time flew — no need to eat, no time to sleep, the payouts just ahead, another \$20 in the slot, no matter it’s the last I brought. An ATM is standing by, it won’t be long before I’m on a winning high.

“On the ride away from you, sanity returns anew. I’m broke, deflated, feeling bad and can’t understand what I just did. It makes no sense to continue to see you when indeed you make me blue. You weren’t a substance I could see, so you insidiously took control of me. The chemical composition of my brain you slowly changed. You became my source of dopamine, and I didn’t know how to intervene.

“I sought relief from Emergence, and they gave me back my belief in me! I now know what you do, and believe me, I am through you. You’re done, your stealth is gone and I am free.”

People like Pat found a way out. She’s one of the few who are willing to step forward and acknowledge this very silent addiction.

Fortunately, most people who choose to gamble don’t have problems. But for those few who do, it’s also fortunate that Oregon maintains its commitment to help problem gamblers and their loved ones.

The Oregon Lottery sends 1 percent of profits to the Problem Gambling Treatment Fund, which provides local, free and confidential help for gamblers and their loved ones. We are fortunate in Lane County to have the Emergence gambling treatment program, an award-winning program that also houses the toll-free, 24-hour state gambling help line, (877) MY-LIMIT.

If you’re going to play, stick to your budget and set a time limit. Don’t spend money you’ll need.

If anyone you know has taken gambling too far, there’s still help. Several treatment options are available for gamblers and loved ones — at no cost — through the help line or online at 1877mylimit.org.

Oregon Problem Gambling Awareness Week is March 1-7. More information about the awareness week, including local efforts, can be found at www.lanecounty.org/prevention. Even during these hard times, there’s still help — and plenty of real hope.

Pat Kellison has completed the women’s program at Emergence gambling treatment and is active in the Lane County Problem Gambling Advisory Committee. Julie Hynes is the problem gambling prevention coordinator with Lane County Health and Human Services.