Romero Says Cards, Bingo Are Not Organized Crimes

NEW IBERIA — Sen. Francis Romero of New Iberia, said Tuesday, a legislature-passed resolution opposing organized crime in the state "was not aimed at the friendly country card games, cock fights, country fair races or social games participated in by so many of our citizens for the sake of enjoyment."

The senator's comments came after reports that Iberia Parish Sheriff G. Jerry Wattigny "has seen fit to interpret this resolution to close down those local establishments where card games and bingo games are held using as his excuse that he was ordered to do so by the legislature."

Romero said the sheriff has not been called on to close down local card and bingo games, but "the legislature has ordered him to do what he should be doing in the first place and that is keeping the professional criminals and organized crime out of Iberia Parish."

The resolution passed by both the House and Senate in Baton Rouge calls for sheriff's and other law enforcement agencies to fully enforce all laws pertaining to organized gambling, prostitution, vice and narcotics.

Romero said he supported the resolution "with the knowledge that you, the people of my district, are as opposed as I am to organized crime which jeopardizes the economic future of our area as well as the future of our young people."

The senator said local country fair races, card and bingo games and cock fights are traditional with the people of south Louisiana.

"These events are used as a means of relaxation, sports and a means of companionship," Romero said.

"I'm not against these, nor have I ever been," the senator from New Iberia said. "Why a handful of people would use the legislature as a whipping post to take away these means of enjoyment from our people is beyond my reasoning."

The senator said Sheriff Wattigny is supposed to keep professional criminals and organized crime out of Iberia Parish, but "instead he is attempting to deprive our citizens of these enjoyments which are part of our everyday custom."

The senator charged that the sheriff is more interested in "political differences and self-satisfaction" than he is "in cooperating with other public officials."

Romero said, "If what the sheriff says when he goes around shutting down local amusements is true, why has none of this affected any of our neighboring parishes? Why is this so suddenly important in our parish after so many years?"