5555 15th Ave NW

Seattle, WA 98015

November 28, 2017

Governor Jay Inslee

Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Jay Inslee:

I’m writing to you about my thoughts on using taxpayer subsidies for building new sports stadiums in Seattle.

Introduction

Currently, there are 5 major professional sports teams that call Seattle home (Wikipedia). Shared amongst them are 3 stadiums that were partially funded by the taxpayers of Washington State.

**The taxpayers of Washington State should not be responsible for the partial payment of new sports stadiums.**

New Stadiums Don’t Benefit Taxpayers

Sports stadiums are designed to accommodate various factors (i.e. the fans, the players, special events, national appeal/city reputation), however, those that finance these sports complexes, the taxpayers, are often overlooked.

* When the St. Louis Rams relocated to Los Angeles in 2016, their previous tenancy (Edward Jones Dome) was abandoned with more than $100 million in unpaid public debt. The decaying stadium’s construction costs are expected to be paid off by 2021, albeit, without the help of an established full-time tenant (Kristian). A similar situation arose in Seattle with the Kingdome. The former home of the Mariners and Seahawks was demolished with $83 million still owed in construction costs; a debt that was paid off 15 years later (Snyder).
* Nationwide, taxpayers are, on average, held responsible for paying 78 percent of the construction costs of new stadiums (Keisling, Pagels). Tax increases usually serve as a viable means of public financing and can affect virtually anything the governing body deems fit. In When the city of Seattle pledged $300 million in public money, the sales tax of rental cars increased by 2 percent, .5 percent tax increase on all food and beverages, and a 5 percent increase on tax for events at the stadium being built (Ballpark)
* The Mariners organization, was one of a handful concerned businesses that questioned the logistics of a proposed basketball/hockey stadium, which would have been built on the next property over. Their main concern involved traffic congestion during games that shared the same time interval (Petchesky).

New Stadiums Don’t Contribute to the Community’s Wellbeing

Using taxpayer funds for large projects, such as constructing sport stadiums, can detract from other state departments or priorities.

* Subsidies that could be allocated to the education system are instead being used on stadiums. Since 2008, six states (Florida, Michigan, New York, Texas, Wisconsin, and Georgia) have reduced funding for education systems, while also allocating combined $4 billion in taxpayer revenue towards new sports stadiums (Gromer).
* The homeless epidemic in Seattle is continuing growth with over 10,000 people living on street currently. Allocating public funds to aid the homeless through local resources should be prioritized ahead of the construction of a new sports stadium. (Homelessness in Seattle).
* Before the St Louis Rams relocated to Los Angeles, their city offered $477 million in public funds to build a new stadium. The team’s owner declined the offer and completed the process of relocation. St. Louis can use this money to instead provide for their city in ways that include: road repair and parks and recreation (Gibbs).

New Stadiums Don’t Always Live up to Expectations

Sport stadiums can be designed with lofty features and hopes of improved logistics, but waste taxpayer money if the end results are not satisfactory.

* The Kingdome was envisioned as the future of sports in Seattle. The city’s ever-persistent rain was its sole motivation for seeking a roofed-stadium design. After its inception in 1976, Seattle had four major professional sports teams playing in the Kingdome. In 1994, just 18 years later, the Kingdome began to show signs of aging after the discovery of leaks in the roof. Attempts to fix these spots resulted in roof panels falling inside the stadium and a repair cost of $51 million (Kingdome).
* The construction of stadiums is purported to promote job creation; albeit, positions that are either temporary or conditionally part-time. Politicians often defend the use of public subsidies by claiming this (Edwards). New stadiums offer job creation in two areas: part-time positions within the complex; which range from concessions to ticket sales, and construction positions; which only last until the stadium is complete. The former consists of part-time shifts that rely on event scheduling.
* Tourism is not affected positively, despite claims that new stadiums attract visitors. Of the tickets sold to major sporting events, only about 10 percent of the attendees are non-local (Keisling, Pagels). In the event of some new stadiums, hotel room rental taxes are subject to an increase to offset lingering construction costs.

Conclusion

The State of Washington should not rely on its taxpayers to finance future sport stadium construction costs. Though its sports teams have displayed acts of heroism and moments of heartbreak in the past few decades, Washington must act to ensure a better future for its taxpayers. Instead of financing sport stadiums with public subsidies, a plan to eliminate this practice can promote the security of the state’s financial future.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach me at [chandler@uwb.edu](mailto:chandler@uwb.edu).

Sincerely,

Chandler Mendoza

Concerned Taxpayer

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