

Ohio Capital Journal's Marilou Johanek, in an April 15 article, discusses state subsidization of a sports facility while important public necessities are grossly short-changed.

The state's public common school system, along with other public essentials, is grossly underfunded but budget makers will put Ohio taxpayers on the hook for a private sports facility. The [Capital Journal](#) provides the sordid details.

If public school advocates could have raised a couple hundred million dollars for campaign funds leading up to the 2024 election season, public school districts would become fully funded and other public services would be funded adequately.

Go figure.

Browns owners gave big money to Ohio lawmakers who now look to make a risky bet with public dollars

Meanwhile, lawmakers are slashing funds for education, libraries, and even infant mortality programs and pediatric cancer research

[Marilou Johanek](#)

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What a con. The billionaire owners of the Browns pulled a doozy on Ohio lawmakers to get the state to pony up a ton of public money for a domed stadium and glitzy development that nobody but Jimmy and Dee Haslam want.

A slick presentation and some up-front cash — if rosy revenue projections flatline — did the trick. All the Haslams had to do to win a \$600 million handout in the budget bill, passed last week by Ohio House Republicans, was convince the supermajority to *trust them* about making good on taxpayer stadium subsidies.

Funny how Donald Trump's henchmen used the same "trust me" pitch to urge shellshocked Americans to just accept that the president knows what he's doing when he tanks the economy, wipes out *trillions* in retirement funds, and launches an incoherent trade war with the world. But I digress.

The Haslams have their own angle to exploit with pliable state legislators, if not the public. They laid the groundwork for over half a billion in state subsidies for their private enterprise with generous campaign checks to Statehouse Republicans and healthy donations to party priorities — like \$100,000 to defeat the anti-gerrymandering initiative last fall.

So, when the Browns lobbied the political beneficiaries of Haslam largesse in Columbus, the die was cast for a publicly subsidized covered stadium complex that could easily be paid for with private dollars.

If the Ohio Senate concurs on the Haslam money ask — a terrible use of finite government resources — the state is poised to pay out \$600 million in state-issued bonds for a *second* Browns stadium in Cuyahoga County based on little more than a *promise* of tangible economic benefits in return.

That's nuts. The news is replete with examples of government-subsidized boondoggles *never* generating the benefits taxpayers were promised. (Still waiting on the Intel miracle to materialize.)

But the list of sports teams promising the moon in new tax revenue, jobs and businesses in sketchy cost-benefit projections and *falling short* — is long. Before Ohio commits to financing the Haslam's stadium and real estate venture with 30 years of bond payments that will, with interest, cost about a *billion* in forgone public services, taxpayers deserve some due diligence on the Browns money-making claims.

That was not done to any degree warranted in the Ohio House before a swift party-line vote forced taxpayers to foot the bill for a massive stadium project purely to appease wealthy team owners who greased GOP chiefs for government windfalls.

It's all about money and power. Forget tangible return on taxpayer investment. There's a mountain of empirical studies on why publicly funded stadiums are a bad idea. It's political malpractice by elected representatives. But House Republicans are stubbornly blind to raw facts when it comes to rationalizing corporate welfare at taxpayer expense.

Ohio House Finance Chair Brian Stewart was practically giddy about giving hundreds of millions in state subsidies (on top of other public contributions for infrastructure improvements to tax abatements) to help the owners of the Browns build their latest plaything.

"We're going to have multiple Super Bowls played in the stadium," he gushed about the brand-new home of a record-losing team — the Browns went 3-14 last season. "This is going to be a destination center!"

Because the Haslams say so, Stewart?

Never mind the economic devastation on downtown Cleveland when the Haslams leave the lakefront for suburban Brook Park, a move that will create its own costly infrastructure nightmare for heavy airport traffic.

Never mind that Cuyahoga County and Cleveland leaders remain adamant that the Browns' "scheme" to relocate out of the city is a "betrayal to Ohio taxpayers" who paid for the stadium and bought the promises of their home team.

Never mind that there is ongoing litigation to keep the Browns in Cleveland and firm opposition by Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne to any local funding for the Browns' Brook Park stadium proposal. He called the Haslams \$3.4 billion plan in the southwest suburb a "risky bet with public dollars" the county should not take and advocated, instead, for renovating the existing Browns stadium on the lakefront.

"Having the stadium down there seems to be in everybody's best interest," said Jimmy Haslam in 2023, "so we're committed to redoing the stadium."

Now he's hitting up state and local governments for big bucks to underwrite what's in *his* best interest; an extravagant and expensive gamble on a tract of land in Brook Park near the congested intersection of Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. But it's taxpayers who will eat the loss of public funds if Haslam's crashshoot is a bust.

Yet rather than slow down deliberations on the Browns' wager and take a closer look at a huge public expenditure beset with more questions than answers, Ohio House Republicans rushed to indulge a prominent campaign donor with deep pockets.

They stuffed their sweetheart bond deal for the Haslams into a budget bill that slashed public school funding, clawed back money from fiscally responsible districts, cut library funds, Medicaid expansion, even programs that target Ohio's still high infant mortality rate and fund pediatric cancer research. How not to make Ohio great again.

But \$600 million in taxpayer subsidies to play fantasy football with billionaires in exchange for government debt with little to no positive economic impact? "A once-in-a-lifetime" project, cooed Stewart. What a con.

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