

## Will Arlington taxpayers play ball again?

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The \$900 million ballgame in Arlington isn't set to begin until 1:30 p.m. CDT on Friday, but already the boo-birds are out in full force.

All of the outrage probably won't matter. It looks as though Arlington city officials have already made up their mind to commit at least \$450 million of taxpayer money to replace Globe Life Park, home of the Texas Rangers.

Arlington taxpayers obliged the Rangers with \$135 million to help build the current stadium — which opened in 1994 — when the city of Dallas made overtures that would have moved the club a few miles east.

And while city government appears to have bought in, it will ask voters to approve whatever the taxpayer cost of the project is, according to the [Fort Worth-Star Telegram](#).

Arlington is still paying off a \$298 million bond, the taxpayer share of the \$1 billion AT&T Stadium, somewhat affectionately known as Jerry World, after Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

While having gone to the taxpayer well three times in the past 25 years for sports stadiums might seem excessive, Arlington's decision and reasoning is much the same as those driving American cities for decades.

“What happens is everyone gets dazzled by the shiny new stadium, the talk of jobs, the improving economy, a championship,” David Williams, president of the Taxpayers Protection Alliance, in Washington, D.C. “It's cool to get a new stadium. The truth is, it just doesn't work.”

Last fall, the [Alliance outlined](#) exactly how it hasn't worked for taxpayers who have underwritten \$7 billion in new construction and renovation for 29 of the NFL's 32 franchises.

The promises of some return on investment — permanent jobs, an increased standard of living, a related business boom — are illusory, Williams told Watchdog on Friday. In six of 10 cities in the study, unemployment went up and average household income went down, although the data can't be tied directly to the stadium projects, he said.

The Taxpayers Alliance joins a long line of those chronicling the folly of cities chasing professional sports franchises. In work dating back 20 years, the Cato Institute found that it was nearly impossible to find the economic benefit in these public/private partnerships.

(You can find Cato's most substantive work in a [roundup](#) here.)

Cato last summer took exception to the effort of Wisconsin's Republican Gov. Scott Walker, erstwhile bane of government unions and professed fiscal conservative, to champion a new stadium for the Milwaukee Bucks at a taxpayer cost of \$250 million.

But Walker's cronyism came just seven years after a series of stories detailing the false promises made by a Democratic mayor in support of Miller Park in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Brewers stadium was funded by a sales tax that has raised more than \$400 million, and strongly supported editorially by the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, a decision the paper's own reporting would later question.

"I think it's important to point out that this isn't a Democratic or Republican thing," Williams said. "It's Republicans and Democrats succumbing to the power of the stadium."

And it isn't only big-time and professional organizations casting spells. Watchdog has long chronicled smaller cities chasing minor league ballparks. And calling out school and community boosters for bad deals on high school stadiums.

As evidenced by the passing earlier this month of a \$63 million bond in McKinney, stadium chasing isn't going to go away, regardless of the empirical evidence.