

# Illinois House Passes Tax Incentive Bill, Bears Want More

By Jon Styf | The Center Square

The Illinois House of Representatives passed a megaproject bill that would set up the Chicago Bears for a hefty property tax break on a new stadium and development in Arlington Heights but that didn't stop the team from immediately asking for more.

"Additional amendments are necessary to make the Arlington Heights site feasible for our stadium project," the Bears said in a statement. "We support Illinois leaders as they determine the path forward to making the essential changes to the mega project bill and aligning on infrastructure funding."

While the deal does not include direct funding for the Bears' stadium, the team has asked for \$887 million from the state to spend on infrastructure for the estimated \$5 billion project on the former Arlington Park race course.

The megaproject bill would freeze property taxes at their current level on the property and add a negotiated special payment beyond that, something that Americans For Prosperity Illinois Deputy State Director Brian Costin could give the Bears up to \$350 million in tax breaks each year over what another business would pay, leading Costin to call the bill the "most terrifying bill I've seen in my 20 year professional career."

The bill extends far beyond the Bears' project, including benefits for a proposed \$30 billion One Central rail project near Soldier Field to connect Metra, Amtrak and the Chicago Transit Authority trains in one spot along with building high-rise residences.

"This is enormously dangerous for people in Illinois who happen to live near the projects," Costin told The Center Square.

The megaproject bill saw renewed urgency in recent months as the Bears claimed to be pursuing a potential stadium near Wolf Lake in Hammond, Indiana.

Leading economist J.C. Bradbury of Georgia's Kennesaw State University has studied the finances of publicly funded stadiums and is the author of an upcoming book titled "This One Will Be Different: False Promises and Fiscal Realities of Publicly Funded Stadiums."

"Economists have been studying public stadiums for about five decades and there has not been one instance that I am aware of in which the stadium has actually paid for itself, that it has generated enough money to pay back taxpayers," Bradbury told The Center Square. "This isn't an investment, it's a subsidy."

Bradbury noted that a Bears move to Indiana would be positive to Illinois taxpayers if they could drive over the stateline to see the team play while Indiana taxpayers subsidized a new stadium.

"You often see these phony threats that 'We're gonna move' and it's very clear that the Bears do not

want to move and that's why they keep threatening to move and, when they get an offer and then they don't move, it makes it clear that it's not very credible," Bradbury said. "I do understand that the Bears might end up making a decision and decide that the situation in Indiana is better than what they have at Soldier Field ... but I think there's going to be some backlash from fans and I don't think it's going to be good financially for them and I think that's why they don't want to do it."

Neil deMause, co-author of the book 'Field of Schemes' and author of a blog with the same name, said the Bears made Jerry Reinsdorf proud after Reinsdorf famously threatened to move the Chicago White Sox out of Chicago to St. Petersburg, Florida, in the late 1980s before later admitting he was never actually intending to move the team.

He pointed out that it isn't completely clear how large of a tax benefit the Bears are set to receive in Arlington Heights because the development plan and what could be included in the area impacted by the megaproject property tax break is not yet defined.

The Bears' initial plans included residential buildings on the former race course but those residential areas cannot be included in the defined megaproject area. It's also unclear what would be defined as infrastructure that the state

and local governments would pay for and what the Bears would fund at the site.

"We don't know exactly how much it's worth," deMause told The Center Square. "It could be \$2 billion, it could be less. The Bears are saying they still want state infrastructure money and we don't know how much that is, so it could be anywhere in the billion, \$2 billion or \$3 billion range. None of those would be a record but any of those would have been a record a year or two ago before we had the Commanders deal."

deMause called the Bears' Wednesday night request for more subsidy "their one chance to leverage that Indiana threat."

"I guess the lesson from past deals is, you can't get if you don't ask," deMause said. "So you may as well demand everything and then see what happens."

If the Bears don't receive their full demands, then the team will have a choice whether to follow through on the threat to move to Indiana or not, he noted.

The bill also included a caveat where officials involved in the deals cannot receive free or reduced priced tickets at a venue that receives property tax breaks through the megaproject bill and officials cannot leave to work for a company that benefits from the property tax breaks within a year of a megaproject agreement being finalized.

## Illinoisans Should Be Concerned, Ranks 45th For Economic Outlook

By Jim Talamonti | The Center Square

A tax and fiscal policy task force director says Illinois residents ought to be concerned about the state's low rankings in a new report.

The American Legislative Exchange Council's Rich States Poor States report ranked Illinois 45th for economic outlook and 49th for economic performance.

Joshua Meyer, director of the tax and fiscal policy task force at the ALEC, said Illinois is missing out on growth that is happening in other states.

"That's something that residents of Illinois perhaps ought to be concerned about. What opportunities for growth are their local economies missing out on because of the state's policies?" Meyer told The Center Square.

Meyer was asked about Gov. J.B. Pritzker's statements touting the state's growth.

"The fact is that more people are leaving Illinois than any state except California and New York. And the state is bottom 10 for

GDP growth and bottom 10 for job growth," Meyer said.

"When you look at these averages of these broad economic rankings, broad economic indicators, it's pretty clear that Illinois is among the bottom states in the country," Meyer said.

Meyer said Illinois has not seen much improvement across the report's 15 competitiveness variables.

"Unfortunately for people in Illinois, over 19 years, it's a state that's been stuck in the bottom 10 with little sign of moving anywhere out of that bottom ten," Meyer said.

He said the state could drop further if it implements a graduated income tax or millionaire's tax.

Aside from the 23rd-ranked personal income tax rate and a ranking of 17th for personal income tax progressivity, Meyer said Illinois does not have much room to fall.

"Why is the state facing fiscal troubles from declining numbers of taxpayers? It's because, well, these policies don't change," Meyer said.

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## Three Sheets in The Wind . . . by Mary

I decided it was time to let the world (or at least those who read this paper) know what really ticks me off; what really puts my nerves on edge; what really turns my quiet, reasonable person into a raving, scary mad woman.

The phone rings, I answer "hello." A couple seconds pass and a friendly voice says, "hello," and I say "hello" again. Then, the final give-away that this is a "robot" call says, "can you hear me." At this point I usually hang up. Once in a while, depending on how far across the house I had to go to get to the phone, I talk back with nasty, cranky remarks. I'm not particularly proud of this, but I'm so very sick of the robots and their cheerful voices. I'll be changing a light bulb, the phone rings, "you may be eligible for big bucks from Medicare." I also get the security for seniors, guaranteed life insurance, I've fallen and I can't get up calls, and the most disturbing end of life insurance calls.

The really scary calls come from a real person who says someone is trying to get a credit card in my name. They say they are from a real bank and they need to verify my Social Security number. This really, really puts my nerves on edge. Can't someone, somewhere put a stop to these calls? If you have a way, you'll get my vote.

Moving on, let's just say that you have indigestion. You have a pill for this ailment, sold over the counter and effective, the perfect pill. It's getting a little uncomfortable, verging on real hurt, actual pain. The pill, that wonderful remedy is one of six on a shiny card, in a box. With the box torn open, the pill is right there, squeezed under a tiny dome on the shiny card. There are instructions for releasing this pill

from its dome, but the print is so fine a spy glass is required. Of course you don't have one handy, if at all. What to do? Pinch it, scratch it, bite it, cut it with scissors? Finally, stick the sharp point of a knife into that little dome and work it open. By this time, the indigestion is either gone or it's killed you. Why don't the packagers simply dump all the pills loose in an envelope and sell it over the counter as is? It probably took an entire team of MIT grads to come up with this method. I wonder if any of them had indigestion.

I'm winding down my complaints, and I'm starting to feel a little lighter, brighter and ready to face my mail. A nice little stack, and every envelope has the name of a charity. I know they all need money. I know they all do good things BUT how can I possibly support them all? I've got thousands of address labels. I have shopping bags, dream catchers, and medals. One group sent nickels in the envelope to help plead their case for money.

I used to wonder at all the bills I got in the mail for services I actually owed. Now, I get letters begging for money. I realize the blame lands right on myself. I gave. It seemed like a really needy, honest charity. It probably is, but part of their fundraising involves selling addresses of those people who have donated. And on and on. Before you know it, you are bombarded with hundreds of requests for "just a small donation".

Well, I feel better now that I got all of that complaining for the day off my mind. Oh, no, that was the phone. It was someone calling to ask for donations to a "pact" to help elect officials who will vote to fund.....so forth and so on. But that's a complaint for another day.



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