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Sunday, April 6, 2014



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Campanelli's commentary: Benefits that way outweigh the cost



By JOHN CAMPANELLI
4:30 am, April 6, 2014

The opponents of the sin tax extension have some solid points. Yes, there are better ways than regressive taxes to fund stadiums. Yes, big-time sports owners probably should pay the costs of the facilities they enjoy. And, yes, money going toward new scoreboards and other "repairs" is more urgently needed elsewhere.

But I'm also a realist.

The arena, stadium and ballpark are not owned by the teams. They are owned by us, the taxpayers. The leases with the Cavs, Indians and Browns say the public is responsible for major repairs. Like it or not,

we are contractually on the hook. If the money doesn't come from taxes on smokes and hootch, it'll come from somewhere else.

That's reality.

But more than just being practical, I support the extension of the sin tax for another reason. Opponents say the economic benefit — \$5 billion in activity, thousands of jobs, \$400 million in local tax revenue — from these buildings has been overstated. I think the benefits, economic and otherwise, are so much *more*.

I bet that \$5 billion of economic benefit is realized *every season* by the scores of sales professionals and executives entertaining clients and closing deals at events. Games and concerts are a tried-and-true way to show gratitude to partners, grease the wheels of business and goose deals.

But I don't want this to be about what happens in the loges, box seats and club level. An egalitarian benefit is realized too, and it goes way beyond — and above — simple dollars.

Less than a year before he died, we took my wife's grandfather, a native of New York City, to then-Jacobs Field to see his Yankees play the Tribe. He was using a walker and could barely make it from the curb to his seat. Once he shuffled down the steps and caught his breath, his eyes were 12 years old again, twinkling under the lights.

My then-7-year-old son and I were lucky enough to be in the very last row, in the corner, of Quicken Loans Arena when the Cavs won the Eastern Conference finals in 2007.

He rode back to the car on my shoulders, high-fiving people on the streets for blocks.

That evening alone is worth 1.5 cents a beer for the rest of my days.

And it's not like you have to flip the turnstiles to enjoy the benefit. Walk into any local nursing home or hospital on a Sunday and try to find a television not tuned into the Browns. Ask the patients and residents if that's not worth a penny on a glass of wine.

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Ask anyone about the time their mom took them to a concert or their dad taught them how to keep score of a ballgame.

In an age of so many divides — technological, partisan, racial, economic, generational — our sports teams are our only common language. It may be the final thing, aside from our region itself, that unites us. In many ways, Issue 7 is like our teams themselves.

Flawed, perhaps, but essential.

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ALAN GLAZEN · an hour ago

How can one justify a 20 year new tax based on how much economic benefit we've received for the previous 20 years of paying for those benefits? You are buying the pro-sinner line, the veiled threat that we could lose these teams if Issue 7 fails. There is a much better funding option available, but in the rush to pass this issue, no one has bothered exploring alternatives. Next week, a far better solution that satisfies all arguments against the sin tax, will be presented. I hope you will be open-minded!

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