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Our View

Unnecessary secrecy cloaks Panthers deal

City help on stadium is sensible, but tax hike is larger than needed

Why is it that \$119 million for a streetcar gets years of public debate but \$144 million for the Carolina Panthers gets none?

Charlotte's City Council went into closed session last month and out popped an agreement to give the NFL team \$125 million to renovate Bank of America stadium. On Friday, the City Council again met privately and ginned up \$19 million more for the team.

Total amount of time any of this has been debated in public? Zero. That is unfortunate since every man, woman and child who eats out in Charlotte for the next 30 years will be chipping in to the kitty through a higher tax on prepared foods and beverages.

The speed with which the council has worked out this deal is a stark contrast to the streetcar. That project has been talked about for seven years or so. Divisions over it sank the city's entire capital plan last year, and council members spent a chunk of their two-day retreat this week publicly discussing the streetcar and other big-ticket projects.

Not so with the Panthers. Team owner Jerry Richardson has said almost nothing publicly about the deal. Mayor Anthony Foxx and the City Council released a summary of it around 4 p.m. Friday. They birthed a tax likely to bring in well more than \$600 million without a single minute of public discussion. Word has it that the vote was 9-1, but the public, naturally, can't know.

The city's approach produces a number of unanswered questions. One of the most urgent: Why raise taxes more than triple the amount needed to fulfill the Panthers' request?

The city would put \$125 million into the renovations over 15 years. Financed at 3.05 percent, that debt would cost the city around \$10.5 million a year. The city also plans to pay \$1.25 million a year for stadium maintenance and game-day traffic control. The city's total tab: \$11.75 million a



CHUCK BURTON - AP

Panthers owner Jerry Richardson seeks \$144 million from Charlotte taxpayers.

year. The 1 percentage point increase in the prepared foods tax would bring in close to \$20 million per year. So the city would raise taxes by about \$8.25 million a year more than necessary to pay for the Panthers' upgrades.

Beyond that, the city's payments end after 15 years. The tax, though, doesn't sunset for 30 years. So the city stands to bring in \$300 million more from the tax after the Panthers are out of the picture. And that's assuming the city doesn't grow at all between now and 2043.

What would all that money pay for? Well, there's been no public discussion. Could the city raise the tax by a smaller amount for a shorter period of time and still give the Panthers all they're asking for? Yes, but the council hasn't debated that publicly either.

It's distressing the city has been so secretive and plans to raise taxes more than required. The Panthers are a treasure for Charlotte. They create jobs and ignite economic activity while creating an undeniable cachet. The \$125 million they sought from the city may feel like blackmail but is much smaller than what other cities are paying to keep their NFL teams happy. And it buys Charlotte 15 more years.

A city partnership with the Panthers makes sense and is part of being an NFL city. Foxx, Richardson and the council shouldn't be so scared of the public who would benefit, and who would foot the bill.

Toonin' in the News

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MICHAEL RAMIREZ
Investor's Business Daily

STAR TRIBUNE
SACK

FIRST TOO HOT, THEN TOO COLD, THEN TOO STUPID... WHO COOKS UP THIS NONSENSE, ANYWAY ???



STEVE SACK
(Minneapolis) Star Tribune



TOM TOLES
Washington Post

U.S. Opinions: Fort Worth

Congress needs to deliver Post Office from its deficit

From an editorial published Thursday in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram:

The U.S. Postal Service, an independent agency that receives no taxpayer money for operation, is a 200-year-old institution still tethered to Congress by centuries-old shackles.

Partly because of that impediment, and changing communication habits in a technologically advanced society, the Postal Service has been losing billions of dollars the past few years - \$15.9 billion in the last fiscal year alone.

This has happened even though it reduced staff, combined operations and cut hours in some underused post offices.

After months of imploring Congress - with little success - to approve cost-cutting measures, including closing thousands of postal stations, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced Wednesday that the USPS will stop Saturday letter delivery.

The move is expected to save \$2 billion a year. But it also conflicts with a 30-year mandate from Congress: Appropriations bills routinely call for six-day delivery.

Donahoe says he has authority to move

forward on the change, which would take effect in August, because Congress hasn't approved an appropriations bill and the government is operating under a continuing resolution (a temporary spending rule).

That temporary measure expires March 27, so lawmakers still would have time to stop the plan if they want to.

Some members of Congress have expressed support for the proposal, but others argue that cutting Saturday service would hurt rural areas and some businesses.

For the Postal Service to return to stability, much less profitability, it must continue to modernize and improve its ability to compete.

The USPS has 546,000 career employees and operates the world's largest fleet of civilian vehicles, according to the agency website, about.usps.com.

While many in Congress understand this, they've found it difficult to consider changes to an institution that their constituents often see as not just a vital service but also a local landmark or an important community center.

But if the agency is to remain any of those things, Congress must let it be a viable business.



Donahoe

MATT WUERKER
Politico



Laugh Attacks

Humorists' comments on politics and public affairs

BILL MAHER



Maher

"The Dow hit 14,000. It hasn't been that high since 2007, heading toward an all-time high. Just think of how big it would be if Obama wasn't such a socialist."

"In an interview last week, Obama said he loves to shoot skeet up at Camp David. Republicans said if he is a skeet shooter, why have we not heard of it? Why have we not seen photos of it? Why have we not seen photos of it? Yes, because nothing would ease the Republican mind more than a photo of the black president with a gun."

JAY LENO

"A new study says that working fewer hours can slow global warming. So you know what that means? President Obama's economic policy is also his climate change policy."

"This is kind of disturbing. The Justice Department has concluded that the president can order drone

strikes on American citizens. And today, Rush Limbaugh came out in favor of Obamacare."

"People are still trying to figure out why the power went out Sunday at the Super Bowl. Today they found out the reason. Turns out China cut off the electricity for nonpayment of our bill."

"When the lights first went out, out of force of habit Ray Lewis started running from security."

"In Great Britain the bones of King Richard III, who was killed in 1485, have been discovered under a parking lot. And you know how he died? Fighting over a parking space."

CONAN O'BRIEN



O'Brien

"Scientists have found the remains of England's King Richard III under a parking lot. Unfortunately, they couldn't find his ticket. So he'll be charged the day rate."

"Next year's Super Bowl is already in the news. It takes place in New Jersey. The NFL says it wants to prevent another blackout. This one involves keeping Chris Christie away from his microwave."

"U.S. employers just added 157,000 jobs to the economy. Of course, most of those were for backup dancers for

Beyoncé."

JIMMY KIMMEL

"A major announcement from the makers of Monopoly today. They're retiring their least-popular game piece - the iron. It will not be a part of the game from now on. They have to keep updating these poor games to keep them fresh. Candy Land just changed its name to Fresh Organic Vegetable Land."

"Monopoly let people in 120 countries vote through Facebook. The choices for a new game piece were a diamond ring, a little robot, helicopter, guitar, and the winner which was a cat. This goes to show you if you let the Internet decide, it will always choose cats."