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## Welfare for quarterbacks, running backs

Welfare is commonly defined as government provision of economic or social benefits to people or entities in need of assistance or relief.

The Indianapolis Colts need taxpayer assistance. According to team management, the fielding of a successful team will require additional investment by fans and taxpayers through increased ticket and suite sales, direct taxpayer subsidies, a new stadium or some combination thereof.

Who wants to return to those dismal days of .500 or sub-.500 seasons? The Indianapolis Colts at 7-2 are forcing the league to take notice. Coach Tony Dungy's history of strong finishes gives fans and taxpayers the confidence this could be the year the millions we have invested in the team will finally pay off.

The home of the Indianapolis Colts, the RCA Dome, cost about \$82 million to build. Taxpayers paid for about half of it.

For the 20 years the Colts have been playing here, county taxes have been levied to support the team. In 2002, about \$30 million was collected to support our professional sports facilities.

With such a large financial commitment, we should hold the owners of our professional sports teams to the same performance standards that exist for



### VIEWPOINT

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individuals and corporations who benefit from government largess. Taxpayers and governmental leaders have concluded that, in return for taxpayer-funded assistance, recipients should demonstrate a commitment to improving their lot.

Taxpayers have long supported state and local economic-development efforts that provide tax credits and other benefits to attract new businesses and to retain growing, existing ones. In the past, some businesses accepted the government's largess but did not meet the job and/or capital-investment criteria. Today, Indiana leads the nation in developing and implementing programs that nurture the economy and that recapture government benefits from businesses that do not meet job and/or capital investment criteria.

What should taxpayers expect of the Colts in return for our hard-earned tax dollars?

First, we should enter into a contract with the team that protects the public's interest in the team and its facilities.

Second, we should contemplate the establishment of clawback provisions in that contract. Clawbacks require beneficiaries of public-sector incentives to repay a portion of or all benefits received if they fail to satisfy specific performance requirements.

Indiana requires companies to repay tax abatements and credits if a business fails to achieve a set of established targets involving the number of jobs created. For

a team, performance involves its presence at an arena for a set number of years. A clawback could offer substantial protection to taxpayers and the community if its value were set at a sufficient level to offset the losses to the community from a team's absence.

Finally, Indianapolis should consider the use of eminent domain to protect its investment in professional sports. Existing state statutes would not permit the use of eminent domain to seize a professional sports team. However, absent clawback provisions or contracts that protect the public's interest, eminent domain would provide a way for the city to protect its investment in the team.

Indianapolis' professional sports teams are a cherished community resource. Unfortunately, taxpayers have finite resources. Schools, roads, law enforcement, economic development and the needy are all worthy uses of funds. Taxpayers face little risk of losing when their dollars are invested for those purposes.

Taxpayers expect individuals who receive public assistance to work diligently to improve their lot. Similarly, taxpayers and elected officials expect businesses to achieve agreed-upon goals. We should also have confidence that the owners of our professional sports teams will meet similar performance obligations. •

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