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Is 2012 Super Bowl wisest investment?

In May, the residents of Indianapolis learned they would host the 2012 Super Bowl. The success of the 2012 bid built upon community efforts for a 2011 bid and required broad community support and significant financial backing by the public and private sectors.



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Commentary

Taxpayer support of the Super Bowl bid included funding more than 95 percent of the construction of Lucas Oil Stadium and additional financial support for its operating expenses, which have been projected to be at least \$10 million more annually than the old RCA Dome; an estimated \$2 million in public safety expenses; approximately \$9 million to construct an NFL-worthy practice facility at Arsenal Technical High School; and an "indeterminate" amount of state and local taxes waived on property, revenue and expenditures by the NFL in preparing for and staging the game, including the Marion County Admissions Tax for the game itself. The private sector agreed to underwrite \$25 million in direct financial support for the Super Bowl and countless volunteer hours preparing for, staging and cleaning up after the event.

The economic impact of a Super Bowl on the host city is subject to vigorous debate in part because economic-impact reports do not follow a consistent methodology. Host committees typically announce economic impacts of \$200 million to \$300 million. However, multiple independent studies by economists place the net new economic activity associated with hosting a Super Bowl between \$30 million and \$100 million.

Regardless of how the economic impact is calculated and what its true value is, it is clear the residents of Indianapolis have made a significant investment in the Super Bowl. As the year draws to a close, many individuals reflect on gains made and lessons learned during the year and set objectives for the coming year. The current economic malaise provides us with ample opportunity to consider the objectives set for 2008 and investments that were funded.

It is worth considering what return the taxpayers of Indianapolis might have received had their millions of dollars invested in the Super Bowl been invested in resolving homelessness, hiring additional police officers, improving primary and secondary education, advancing mass transit or recycling efforts, stocking food banks, expanding publicly funded art and cultural programs, offering training to those who

have lost their jobs, or investing in neighborhood support programs for homeownership.

These and many other worthy causes require similar levels of public support and investment to resolve. The resolution of one or all of these efforts would have positive long-term impacts on the city. However, none of these efforts require the taxpayers and civic leaders of Indianapolis to meet the questionable terms the billionaire owners of the NFL impose for hosting their friends at its championship game. With individual tickets expected to cost more than \$1,000 each, it is unlikely many residents of central Indiana will attend the game.

Super Bowl 2012 will add to Indianapolis' reputation as an inviting city, capable of hosting major sporting events. For the brief moment when the game captures the national attention, Indianapolis residents will gain a little something extra.

However, let us undertake a similar effort to resolve the many challenges before us that will make a lasting impact on all those who reside in Indianapolis, the citizens who will be here long after the NFL elite have left town in their private planes. •

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