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# THOMAS WEATHERSTON

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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July 24, 2015

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MILLER PARK AND BUCKS ARENA MAKE THE ARENA LEGISLATION A SLAM DUNK**

In order to prepare my Stadium District Reform Bill my staff and I have been studying the Miller Park legislation for over a year. I'd have to say it was one of the worst, if not the worst, pieces of legislation I have seen or will ever see. The taxpayers in the five county stadium tax district (Milwaukee and surrounding counties including Racine) really got stuck with a lemon, and there's no squeezing it to make lemonade. The only thing being squeezed here is the taxpayers. Comparing the Miller Park bill and the Bucks Arena bill is like comparing night and day.

First, the Miller Park bill created a sales tax in Milwaukee, Racine, Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington Counties. And, like any tax, once it's established it's hard to make it go away. Just look at news accounts regarding the stadium tax over the years. On January 7, 2005, the Stadium Board reported, "the stadium tax remains on track to end in 2014." Then on March 4, 2008, a stadium consultant reported that, "the sales tax might extend to 2017." Two years later in 2010 financial projections suggested that the Miller Park stadium sales tax will be paid off "between 2016 and 2018." Three years after that in March of 2013, a forecast said the Miller Park sales tax could end "as soon as 2016 or as late as 2020." In March of this year the financial advisor to the Stadium District said in a letter that "we believe the District should be able to satisfy all of its outstanding obligations between 2017 and 2020." The Bucks Arena bill does not create a new tax.

Next, the Miller Park legislation contained no taxpayer protections and set up a Stadium District with little oversight. The legislation that made Miller Park possible said that taxpayers were liable for \$160 million of the estimated \$250 million in construction costs with the Brewers making up the \$90 million balance. But by the time the stadium construction was completed, taxpayer liability increased to \$310 million when construction costs ballooned over the life of the project to nearly \$400 million. Cost overruns were picked up courtesy of you, the taxpayer, because there were no protections in the bill. The Bucks Arena bill limits state taxpayer liability to \$80 million, cost overruns are paid for out of the owner's pockets.

Finally, the lease is where the insult was added to the injury to the taxpayers after the Miller Park bill was passed. Taxpayers are treated as an unwitting third party to the lease. The Stadium District as the landlord sticks taxpayers with the bill for a large portion of the costs of maintenance and upkeep. The lease requires the team to pay rent, yet the rent they pay doesn't even cover the maintenance costs of Miller Park. What kind of landlord does that you ask? The



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same kind of landlord that plans to buy two more brand new scoreboards, the second one in the final year of the lease, at a cost of \$6 million each. Further, did you know taxpayers paid a good chunk of the costs for the “mini-Miller Park” officially known as Helfaer Field? According to a flyer, Helfaer Field “...is a real-life *Field of Dreams*. You will feel the thrill of playing in the Majors every time you step on the diamond at this premier facility, complete with a big-league scoreboard, sound system and lit playing field.” The cost of the field was \$3.1 million with \$2.1 million coming from the Helfaer Foundation. Taxpayers and the team were liable for a 70/30 split respectively for the remaining \$1.1 million. Is this maintenance and upkeep? Under the Bucks arena legislation, after the arena is built, maintenance and upkeep and improvements are the Bucks’ responsibility, not the taxpayer’s.

The Miller Park legislation is the model of what not to do when determining public support for professional sports venues. We’ve learned a thing or two since then, and the Bucks Arena proposal reflects that. Overall, the limits on taxpayer exposure combined with the basic math of keeping the Bucks vs. losing the Bucks makes this a proposal worth supporting.

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