

**Jules Boykoff, Professor and Department Chair, Political Science, Pacific University**

**Written testimony on Measure: SB 110 for the House Committee on Revenue, 15 May 2025**

My name is Jules Boykoff. I am a professor of political science at Pacific University, and I have written six books about the politics and economics of sports mega-events. Sports extravaganzas like the Olympics and soccer World Cup often involve building new stadiums, so I am well familiar with the arguments for and against using public funding to do so.

I am here today to urge serious caution about this stadium proposal. Please let me say that I don't arrive today as some grumpy academic with a built-in penchant for dismissing sports. I am a former professional soccer player who played collegiately at the University of Portland and who represented the US U-23 national soccer team in international competition. I believe deeply in the power of sport. And yet, despite my love of sports, I cannot advocate for using public money in this fashion.

In my years of studying the political economics of stadium construction, a clear pattern has emerged:

Step 1 is multimillionaire and billionaire owners hiring economists to produce analysis and impact statements that inevitably support using public money to build stadiums. These studies, again paid for by boosters, ignore what economists call the substitution effect: Oregonians don't miraculously see an increase in their discretionary income just because Portland might decide to get a baseball team. People who spend money at the ballpark substitute it for spending elsewhere, like their neighborhood cafés and shops.

Step 2 is, quite often, taking these analyses from the economic consultants at face value and plunging millions of public dollars into a stadium or using the government's limited bonding power to backstop these projects. ECONorthwest was hired by the Portland Diamond Project to model scenarios for them.<sup>1</sup>

Step 3 involves post facto analysis by independent sports economists who find across the board that, stadium building is a losing proposition. One academic review that analyzed 130 studies spanning over 30 years concluded that "The large subsidies commonly devoted to constructing professional sports venues are not justified as worthwhile public investments."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tanvi Varma, "Portland Takes its case for Major League Baseball to Oregon Lawmakers," *KATU*, 4 March 2025, <https://katu.com/news/local/portland-takes-its-case-for-major-league-baseball-to-oregon-lawmakers>

<sup>2</sup> John Charles Bradbury, Dennis Coates, and Brad R. Humphreys, "The Impact of Professional Sports Franchises and Venues on Local Economies: A Comprehensive Survey" *Journal of Economic Surveys*, (31 January 2022): [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4022547](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4022547)

A separate piece done by a renowned sports economist came to the conclusion that “Study after study has shown that stadiums are terrible public investments.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, independent economists who have looked at the proposal that is under consideration today have slammed it. One economist concluded, “This looks like a guaranteed money loser for taxpayers in at least the half-a-billion-dollar range.”<sup>4</sup>

I’d like to conclude by asking: do you really believe this is the best use of public bonds? We are living in an extraordinary political-economic moment where we get daily, jarring reminders that many of the normal rules no longer apply. Oregon’s economy is slumping and you, as legislators, are going to have to get creative to avoid cuts to crucial existing services.

This is far from the ideal time to succumb to the normal three-step process that I described above, loaded as that process is with dubious claims that have been debunked by *independent* academic economists who do not receive their paycheck from the sports industry.

Neither the State of Oregon nor the City of Portland have unlimited bonding power. We ought to use our limited bonding power to address the *needs* of everyday Oregonians, not the *desires* of a baseball ownership group.

Why not use our bonding power to address the historic crisis around housing and homelessness, subsidizing quality housing for all? Why not use it to build up the Internet infrastructure in rural parts of the state? Using our bonding power to assist millionaires and billionaires with their sporty dreams is out of tune with the moment. Thus, despite my personal affinity for sports, I urge you to vote no on this bill.

Thank you.

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### **Two additional critical, nuanced academic assessments:**

- Victor A. Matheson and Robert Baade, *The Economic Impact of Sports Facilities, Franchises, and Events* (Springer Nature Link, 2023), <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-39248-1>
- John Charles Bradbury, “Sports Stadiums and Local Economic Activity: Evidence from Sales Tax Collections,” *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 46, Issue 1 (2024): 139-159, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07352166.2022.2044837>

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<sup>3</sup> Victor Matheson, “I’ve Studied Stadium Financing for Over Two Decades – and the New Bills Stadium Is One of the Worst Deals for Taxpayers I’ve Ever Seen,” *The Conversation*, 15 April 2022, <https://theconversation.com/ive-studied-stadium-financing-for-over-two-decades-and-the-new-bills-stadium-is-one-of-the-worst-deals-for-taxpayers-ive-ever-seen-180475>

<sup>4</sup> Neil deMause, “Can a Portland MLB stadium pay for itself with “no impact” to Oregon?” *Field of Schemes*, 1 April 2025: <https://www.fieldofschemes.com/2025/04/01/22513/can-a-portland-mlb-stadium-pay-for-itself-with-no-impact-to-oregon-ha-ha-it-is-to-laugh/>. The author noted, “The Oregon bill assumes that players would pay 8.62% of their salaries in state income taxes and non-players 6.36%, which comes to \$27 million a year — only enough to cover around \$400 million in bonds. If baseball salaries rise by 3% a year, meaning the average player would be earning \$14 million a year by the 2050s, then you could pay off around \$600 million in bonds, by my back-of-the-envelope math — but if salaries are flat or fall, the state of Oregon could end up hundreds of millions of dollars in the hole...[M]uch of those ‘new’ income tax revenues wouldn’t actually be new.”