THE PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY REPORT

End NFL Subsidies as It Moves to Gambling

by John and Andy Schlafly

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Nearly a billion dollars in taxpayer money are being wasted by the NFL Oakland Raiders' move to Las Vegas. In direct costs are the $750 million in taxpayer subsidies to build a luxurious new stadium in the desert, plus roughly $95 million in unpaid debt on the stadium that will be left behind in Oakland.

Oakland taxpayers had already spent $110 million in improvements to the stadium being abandoned. St. Louis taxpayers are still on the hook for $85 million of the $300 million they committed to for the Rams' now-abandoned stadium; San Diego owes $47 million on the football stadium renovated for the Chargers, who have moved to Los Angeles.

That is pricey litter by the billionaire NFL owners, which blights our struggling cities. Where are the environmentalists when we need them?

Overall, an estimated $6.7 billion in public money props up NFL stadiums today. In addition, the NFL receives tax breaks and free public services, and demands massive sales taxes refunds from locations that host the Super Bowl.

Now the NFL has gone from bad to worse. Last month nearly every NFL owner approved the move of the Oakland Raiders to Las Vegas, cozying up to gambling.

Former NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle would roll over in his grave if he knew. Rozelle, a long-time admirer of Phyllis Schlafly, prohibited the playing of NFL games on Christmas to avoid interfering with the holy day.

Pete Rozelle built the NFL for 29 years into the success it is today by defending its integrity against the corrupting influence of gambling. The NFL had even prohibited visits to Las Vegas during the football season, and had banned advertisements to promote Vegas during the Super Bowl.

The NFL still publicly pretends to disfavor gambling on its games, yet nearly all of its teams have signed lucrative, multi-million-dollar deals for "fantasy football" to encourage gambling by fans. As Phyllis Schlafly walked around

Cleveland Browns stadium last summer for her pro-life event during the Republican national convention, she faced many banners promoting fantasy football.

This is not Pete Rozelle's NFL any more, but "fantasy football" is profitable for it. Now, with the move of one of the most widely followed franchises to the gambling capital of the United States, there can be little doubt where the NFL really stands.

Yet hypocrisy lingers as the NFL still publicly opposes betting on its games. Its real underlying issue probably has more to do with whether it profits from the gambling.

Betting on NFL games already constitutes more than 40% of all the lawful sports betting in Nevada. In addition, the American Gaming Association estimates that $150 billion is spent annually on illegal sports betting.

So why are taxpayers subsidizing the corporate welfare to the NFL as it moves towards gambling? We should not be footing the bills for the billionaires who are profiting from the massive taxpayer subsidies to the NFL.

The NFL has abandoned numerous stadiums to depress the downtowns of multiple cities. In addition to forcing taxpayers to pay massive costs for these stadiums, many have been financed with tax-exempt bonds.

A study by the Brookings Institute revealed that 36 of the 45 stadiums built or significantly renovated since 2000 used tax-exempt municipal bonds, which indirectly cost federal taxpayers $3.7 billion. Meanwhile, "abandoned stadiums" as an internet search yields nearly a half-million website displays of dilapidated structures left behind as billionaires found new cities to fleece.

Oklahoma congressman Steve Russell has introduced H.R. 811, the "No Tax Subsidies for Stadiums Act," to close the tax exemption for financing these stadiums. His bill would "amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to treat obligations financing professional sports stadiums as private activity bonds if such obligations meet the private business use test."

This bill could go further and end the tax write-offs for the luxury boxes purchased by corporate executives in these wasteful stadiums. States could also

pass laws prohibiting sales tax refunds to the NFL for the Super Bowl, which amount to millions of dollars.

New Jersey ended up paying so much to the NFL after hosting the Super Bowl in 2014, without a significant boost to local commerce, that 55% of its business leaders surveyed said they do not want the Super Bowl hosted in their state again. Yet the NFL uses the Super Bowl to threaten state legislators against enacting conservative legislation, as it did earlier this year to Texas.

Fortunately, the public is waking up. Voters are increasingly rejecting demands by the NFL for greater subsidies, and rightly so; Las Vegas raided its taxpayer's pockets for the Raiders only by persuading the state legislature to pony up the money.

Television ratings for the NFL were down last season after years of boundless growth. Despite the most exciting finish ever, more people decided not to watch the Super Bowl.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) whose 27th book, The Conservative Case for Trump*, was published posthumously on September 6*.