

## **The New Penguin Arena**

by

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The new energy infused by young stars like Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Jordan Staal and Marc-Andre Fleury is electric. It's been amazing to see enthusiastic college students line up all the way around the arena for discount student rush tickets before the game.

It's been wonderful to see the standing room only sellout crowds that these stars have brought to Mellon Arena. It's been highly entertaining to watch little kids and big adult kids get up and dance whenever there is a stop in the action and the scoreboard highlights their impromptu antics.

Not surprisingly, the Penguins have also been very good for my business. I frequently take clients to games and it is always a big hit. While the action is non-stop, you do have those two intermission periods where you get a chance to discuss future business opportunities. The Penguins definitely have an economic impact that goes beyond the game.

Last but not least, I think Mario Lemieux is a class act. Even though he came to our city without speaking the English language, he has been a terrific asset, role model and ambassador to the city of Pittsburgh over the years. It appears that the new Penguin regime lead by Sidney Crosby is following in those large footsteps.

But as much as I love the Penguins, as much as it would break my heart that they would leave, as much as it would negatively impact my business, I am opposed to the use of taxpayer money to fund an arena and I'm very disheartened by the drama that is being played out to keep the Penguins in town. For the 3rd time in less than 10 years our aging population base in Western Pennsylvania is going to be asked to pay for something they cannot afford.

I don't fault the Penguin ownership or the politicians for this unfortunate episode. I think the Penguin ownership is doing what any ownership group of any business would do. And I think our politicians are doing their very best to keep something here that is in our region's best economic interest.

Instead, I blame a federal government asleep at the switch which permits cities and states to compete against each other with taxpayer money for these sports venues. I know this subject is much broader than sports teams. I know valued corporations are being lured from one US city to another with subsidies and preferential taxes every day. That is a very important topic for a more educated debate. My issue is a system that gives these leagues the ability to squeeze every last penny out of the taxpayers' pocket. It's ridiculous and it shouldn't be this way.

Congress under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution has the power to save us from ourselves and keep taxpayer money where it belongs - in our pockets. I believe a law should be passed that prohibits the use of taxpayer money for any sports stadium or arena that could be used by any of the major sports leagues. How could something like that not have the overwhelming support from a fed-up American public?

While there isn't enough time to prevent whatever decision is made regarding the new arena funding, we somehow need to encourage our Congress men and women to put an end to this travesty. These leagues can find their own financing.

Of course I want the Steelers, Pirates and Penguins here. I'm more than willing to pay the price as a customer. But I'm not willing to pay any price as a taxpayer.



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