

Cities Prefer Sports Parks to Power

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The numbers coming from the Bush Administration are staggering. It's going to cost at least \$50 billion to upgrade the country's aging electrical power grid. The Philadelphia area was lucky back on August 14 and 15. People had electricity but it could have been far different. Regardless, Philadelphia residents will eventually have to pay more for power.

And when you start thinking about the cost to bring the nation's power grid up to 21st century state-of-the-art technology, the final price may actually be less than the money taxpayers have put into baseball parks, football stadiums and indoor arenas across the country.

After all, Philadelphia is paying more than a billion dollars for the Eagles' and Phillies' new workstations (taxpayers are picking up one-third of the bill). And that's without taking into account paying off interest on the debt. So maybe rebuilding the power infrastructure is a bargain compared to what we have paid for new and renovated sports facilities nationally.

The Oregon State Legislature recently passed a bill that could allocate hundreds of millions of dollars as seed money for the construction of a Major League Baseball park in Portland. Those politicians should have studied what happened in Cleveland during the Northeast blackout before they decide to dole out hundreds of millions of dollars.

Cleveland, which has spent probably a billion dollars on sports facilities, apparently doesn't have back up power generators to keep its water supply going when there is an energy disruption. But it did have money for the cosmetic and elitist entertainment that major league sports has evolved into.

Baseball Commissioner Fay Vincent in the early 1990s threatened Cleveland officials, telling them that the city would lose its baseball team if the city didn't come forward with money to build a new baseball park. City officials cobbled together a proposal to raise the tax on tobacco and alcohol sold in Cleveland to pay for the stadium. Voters agreed in a referendum vote that the Indians should have a

new facility and the Indians were saved. At roughly the same time, the city put up money for a new indoor arena for the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers to go along with the stadium and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 1995, Browns owner Art Modell concluded that the city had no money for his NFL team and moved to Baltimore. By 1998, the NFL returned to Cleveland and opened a taxpayer funded new football facility.

After the blackout, some 1.5 million Cleveland area residents were told to boil their water because no one was sure if the tap water was clean enough to drink. Detroit and Michigan have spent \$320 million for new facilities for the Tigers and Lions, but had water problems from the power outage. Having a major league team is worthless if people can't get to games because governments didn't invest in infrastructure like power grids.

Philadelphia was lucky on Aug. 14 and 15. But here's a question that needs to be asked. Did the city give thought to emergencies when it allocated millions upon millions of dollars to build new sports facilities?

You might not want to know the answer.