

# Ohio legislative leaders shrug off warnings about Cleveland Browns' stadium plan

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COLUMBUS, Ohio--Ohio legislative leaders don't appear fazed by the release of two reports this week casting doubt on the economic argument for \$600 million in new state bonds to help build a new Cleveland Browns stadium in suburban Brook Park.

The memos, from [state budget director Kim Murnieks](#) and [the legislative budget office](#), respectively, question the Browns' assurances that the state debt can be repaid in full with state tax revenue generated from the \$2.4 billion stadium and \$1 billion surrounding mixed-use development.

They also dispute the Browns' projections of how many people would visit the new covered stadium, how many non-football events the facility would host, and how many jobs the project would create, among other things.

But when Senate President Rob McColley was asked Wednesday for his thoughts on the reports, he said the Senate is still trying to figure out which side to believe as they take up consideration of the state's massive two-year budget plan, which includes the bond proposal.

"When the Browns put forward those numbers, they're not putting forward numbers that they grabbed out of a hat. They've hired professionals on their side, too," said McColley, a Northwest Ohio Republican. "I think that's kind of the public back-and-forth that's going on right now."

McColley added that as senators review the House-added bond plan, they are "going to make sure that those numbers add up" and insist that any stadium aid proposal they might pass includes some sort of "fail-safe" to ensure the state gets its money back.

Some senators have been [discussing the idea](#) of merging the bond plan with [Gov. Mike DeWine's proposal](#) to double the state's tax on sports-betting companies to create a permanent stream of money for stadium projects.

The Browns assert that the state income, sales, and commercial activities tax revenue generated from the Brook Park project will not only be enough to pay off the \$1 billion price tag of the \$600 million state bond issuance, but it will result in the state getting \$1.3 billion in leftover tax revenue over the next 30 years.

Despite those predictions, Browns owners Jimmy and Dee Haslam have also [offered to make a deposit](#) in an interest-bearing escrow account that could be tapped into if there are any tax revenue shortfalls. The House budget sets that deposit at \$50 million.

House Speaker Matt Huffman, meanwhile, told reporters Wednesday that he hadn't read the Murnieks or legislative budget office memos – even though he said early last month that he and other lawmakers were the ones who sent the Browns' calculations to the state's budget office for analysis.

The Lima Republican noted that while Murnieks' memo was dated March 26, the DeWine administration didn't publicly release the document until earlier this week, well after [the House passed the bond proposal in mid-April](#).

"I guess it would have been nice to have that report while we were reviewing all of that," Huffman said.

Despite that, Huffman said he was "comfortable with the vote that we took in the House" to pass the bond plan.

"We've got a couple months to figure out exactly where this all lands," he said.

When Huffman was asked about Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne's [request this week for \\$350 million in state aid to renovate the Browns' current lakefront stadium](#), the speaker replied that he hadn't seen the proposal.

However, Huffman added, he doesn't think it's a coincidence that Ronayne is seeking the exact same amount of money that [the Cincinnati Bengals are requesting from the state](#) to help renovate their stadium.

State Rep. Sean Brennan, a Parma Democrat and a vocal critic of state aid for a Browns stadium, said in a release that Murnieks' memo proves that the Browns "greatly inflated" the increased tax revenues, job creation, and return on investment from a new Brook Park stadium.

“This report also proves why the Ohio Statehouse should not be used as the personal bank for billionaires,” Brennan stated. “I remain hopeful that the proposal will be removed, and we can now craft a budget that prioritizes hard-working Ohioans.”