



NFL Owners Are Patriotic — For a Fee

“Follow the money.” That is often good advice, if someone wants to find out why many individuals do what they do. It is apparently excellent advice if one wants to know why many owners of National Football League (NFL) teams do what they do.

While many heretofore NFL fans have rightly expressed disgust at the anti-patriotic statements and actions of many NFL *players* (and make no mistake, the protests are directed at what Colin Kaepernick, who started it all last season, contends is a racist country), are the *owners* any better?

Most fans would have understandably concluded that all these patriotic demonstrations before games, and sometimes during halftime shows, take place because the owners are just extremely patriotic lovers of their country. Of course, they should be lovers of this country, considering that they have been able to become very wealthy in America.

But it has now been revealed that the Defense Department has given millions of taxpayers’ dollars to NFL teams to put on a show of patriotism — including having players stand during the playing of the National Anthem. Prior to 2009, the teams remained in the locker room until the National Anthem was concluded. Senator Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), addressing this issue in 2015, found the pay for the patriotism charade distasteful. “Those of us [who] go to sporting events and see them honoring the heroes; you get a good feeling in your heart,” Flake said to NJ.com. “Then to find out they’re doing it because they’re compensated for it, it leaves you underwhelmed. It seems a little unseemly.”

Flake added, “They [the owners] realize the public believes they’re doing it as a public service or a sense of patriotism. It leaves a bad taste in your mouth.”

There is little doubt that being seen as being patriotic is good for business for NFL owners, and most fans who gave it much thought probably realized that the motives of the owners were somewhat mercenary, but few probably suspected the U.S. government was actually paying the owners to put on demonstrations of patriotism. A professional sports team is, at its core, entertainment, and owners are certainly within their rights as business owners to require players to perform in such a way as to get more fans in the stands and watching them on TV. It is no different from a fast-food employee being required to ask, “Do you want fries with that?” when all the customer really wanted was a hamburger. After all, the owners are in business to make money, and fans are their customers. Most NFL fans are patriotic, so why not give them what they want?

NFL owners, of course, have come to expect that the taxpayers (many of whom do not even like sports) should fork over millions of dollars to stuff the bank accounts of the clubs. For example, all across the country, owners have demanded — and usually received — large subsidies from local governments to construct stadiums. Professional sports team owners are not alone, of course, in that many other corporate interests enjoy substantial subsidies from government (taxpayers). But no one seriously





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thinks the taxpayers should pay for the drive-through lane at McDonald's. So why should taxpayers foot the bill for a sports stadium, or less-than-pure demonstrations of patriotism?

According to a report issued in 2015 by the Senate Oversight Committee, the NFL practiced "paid patriotism," conducted "not out of a sense of patriotism, but rather done 'for profit in the form of millions of taxpayer dollars going from the Department of Defense to wealthy pro sports franchises.'"

And it was not just pro football. The Pentagon also paid for "patriotic" shows at professional baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer games. Paid tributes included enlistment and reenlistment ceremonies, performances of the National Anthem, and even puck drops in hockey.

The taxpayer payments to NFL teams began during the Obama administration. Obama spokesman Josh Earnest tried to defend the arrangement, stating, "I do know the Department of Defense would likely say that these kinds of relationships enhance their recruiting efforts."

Brad Carson, an undersecretary of defense for Obama, argued that the economy's improvement necessitated the contracts with professional sports franchises, so as to meet recruiting goals. "Sports events are an important component of this process," he asserted.

Enlistments in the all-volunteer military have understandably fallen off in the past several years, with repeated deployments in Middle Eastern wars and the use of the military to advance liberal causes such as sensitivity-training sessions so soldiers will know about "white privilege," the inclusion of women in combat roles, and support for transgenderism. Perhaps the armed forces should return to the military's role of defending the nation rather than policing the world. That, combined with the ditching of political correctness, would mean that the paying off of professional sports owners would not be necessary.

Considering that the Pittsburgh Steelers did not leave the locker room for the National Anthem in Sunday's game against the Chicago Bears, but the taxpayers had paid for them to do so, we are entitled to a refund. That would make a small payment on the national debt, which at least would be somewhat "patriotic."



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