

## TRAIL OF TERROR

# Opposition to subsidy of Bass Pro Store Grows

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### Constitution

Texas-based Academy Sports and Outdoors, one of the nation's largest sporting goods chains, is being accused of pumping \$100,000 into a campaign to kill a proposal by Oklahoma City to subsidize an Oklahoma City store for Springfield, Missouri-based Bass Pro Shops. The campaign, which includes radio and print ads is being run by Citizens Against Taxpayer Abuse. Also opposed to the city's plan, is Jeff Tebow, Oklahoma City owner of Outdoor Outfitters. Oklahoma City Mayor Kirk Humphreys and other Downtown civic leaders say the Bass Pro store will bring tourists and jobs to Oklahoma City.

Opponents of the Bass Pro Deal charge that Oklahoma City taxpayer dollars will be used to bring in a private business to compete with existing businesses which are not subsidized. They fear the deal will put hundreds of existing jobs in jeopardy and establish an expectation of government subsidies for future incoming businesses. Academy, which is planning to open another store in the city (not at taxpayer expense), says it is unfair competition.

The opponents note that the city's own study of the proposal shows that over 40% of the sales at the proposed Bricktown Bass Pro store would come at the expense of Academy, Outdoor Outfitters, and other existing retailers. In addition to the businesses that would suffer from the proposed deal, there is growing opposition from Oklahoma City taxpayers. A poll released April 3, 2002 by Citizens Against Taxpayer Abuse shows that two thirds of Oklahoma City residents oppose the use of taxpayer dollars to fund a Bass Pro Shop at Bricktown in Oklahoma City. The survey was conducted by Baselice and Associates, a national polling firm with extensive credentials in polling and public opinion research. The poll of over 500 randomly selected Oklahoma City voters was conducted on March 27-28, 2002. Jeff Kaufmann, spokesperson for Citizens Against Taxpayer Abuse, explained that "67% of those surveyed oppose the use of tax dollars for the project."

Under the proposed deal, the City would spend up to \$18 million to construct Bass Pro's proposed 110,000 square-foot building. The construction would be financed through a bond issue, and repaid with an annual pledge of City sales

tax revenue. The final bond cost of the store would be \$2.5 million per year. According to the proposed 15-year contract, Bass Pro would pay only \$600,000 a year to occupy the building. So, Oklahoma City taxpayers would be paying 75% of the rent.

City leaders argue increased sales taxes generated by the store will help make the bond payments. According to the City's consultant, Bass Pro Shops, which is partially owned (19 percent) by Gaylord Entertainment Co., could make \$38.5 million in annual sales at the proposed Oklahoma City store. The Oklahoma City Council must still approve the final deal being negotiated between the City and Bass Pro. Opponents hope to convince the Council to reject the deal.