

## Editorial: Idea for independent airport-privatization study gets frosty Krewson response

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St. Louisans might overwhelmingly support the idea of privatizing St. Louis Lambert International Airport. Then again, they might overwhelmingly hate the idea. Mayor Lyda Krewson and other supporters of the current privatization process would never know because they've steadfastly avoided letting voters have a chance to weigh in. The process has been so heavily rigged against input from all but a tiny sliver of paid consultants and airport interests, the public really has no idea what's being planned in their name.

Yet now Krewson is claiming victim status in the information freeze-out. She wasn't consulted before St. Charles and St. Louis counties sought to fill the information vacuum by proposing their own independent study of privatization and regional airport governance. "I do think the fact that we had no heads-up on this, not even a courtesy call — 'Hey, we're going to study your airport' — is not exactly in the spirit of cooperation and regionalism. It's not very neighborly," she told the St. Louis Business Journal.

It must feel awful to be left out of the loop like that. Awfully ironic, that is, considering how she neglected to inform either the St. Louis County executive, County Council president or county police chief of her proposal last spring for the county to provide 42 officers to help patrol the city as violent crime escalated. Krewson did, however, share her proposal with a private business executive.

Communication between Krewson and other top leaders in the region has degraded to an abysmal state. No wonder the region is so fractured and inefficiently managed. Given how the privatization process has unfolded in secret so far, why should St. Louisans trust any proposal that excludes local voters from having a say and, as St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann notes, shuts out 88% of the regional travelers who use the airport?

A lack of independent analysis and oversight has tainted the privatization process from the beginning. The person funding the consultant study, campaign megadonor Rex Sinquefeld, has a direct interest in privatization. The consultants won't get reimbursed by taxpayers for their work unless privatization proceeds. The result sure seems predetermined.

An independent study, including a review of regional-governance potential, is a great idea, offering far more credibility and greater likelihood of public acceptance than the one Krewson's administration is pushing. If the governments of St. Charles and St. Louis counties are willing to pay for it, more power to them.

Krewson suggests that outside counties' interest in Lambert is driven by a desire to get a piece of the financial windfall from privatization. Did she consider that they might be trying to guard this vital regional economic asset, used primarily by their residents, from being driven into a ditch? Neighborly communication is the first step toward fixing the airport, reducing crime and improving regional cooperation. Krewson might try it sometime.

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