

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-daley-olympicsjun28,0,5557047.story

chicagotribune.com

Daley flip-flops on Olympic contract explanation

Mayor offers contradictory accounts about pledging to guarantee funding in Chicago's bid for 2016 Olympics

By David Heinzmann and Dan P. Blake

Tribune reporters

June 28, 2009

If confusing political spin was an Olympic event, Mayor Richard Daley would be in line for a gold medal following his attempt Friday to explain whether he's putting taxpayers on the hook for the 2016 Summer Games.

The mayor's first public appearance in Chicago since meeting with Olympic officials in Switzerland last week turned into an often bewildering news conference. At issue was his surprise decision to reverse course and tell the International Olympic Committee his city would take full financial responsibility if it wins the Games.

Daley aides and members of Chicago's Olympics bid team spent all week explaining why the mayor's about-face was necessary and seeking to dampen the political firestorm it created.

But on Friday, Daley offered muddled and conflicting versions of his pledge to sign the standard Olympics contract in a bid to win the Games.

In a news release, Daley said he may have "spoke too quickly" when he agreed in Switzerland to give an unlimited financial guarantee.

Pressed by reporters, Daley then seemed to suggest he hadn't made a blanket guarantee: "I just said I will sign an agreement, I didn't say which one." He added the city still planned to amend the Olympics contract to ease Chicago's liability.

But that is markedly different from Daley's remarks immediately after emerging from his June 17 meeting with the IOC, when he told the Tribune he had just agreed to sign the host city contract "as is." Daley's account was confirmed by IOC President Jacques Rogge.

"The mayor said he will sign the host city contract. We have only one host city contract," Rogge said last week. "There is no amendment to the host city contract whatsoever from the IOC."



CSX

The contract puts full responsibility for potential financial losses squarely on the host city, and for months Daley and the bid team pledged not to sign the contract, which could put taxpayers on the hook if there are cost overruns beyond the \$750 million level the city and state already have agreed to cover. They secretly reversed course in the weeks before the critical Switzerland meeting after Olympics officials said they expected the contract to be signed without modifications.

The reversal alarmed aldermen who had not been consulted about the fundamental change to the city's potential financial liability for the Olympics. They were further concerned by the Daley administration's position that it didn't need council approval for the broader guarantee.

Chicago 2016 Chairman Patrick Ryan went to City Hall for a series of private meetings this week to soothe aldermen. At the meetings Ryan told aldermen Daley had no choice but to go along with international Olympics officials.

It was impossible to say whether Daley's shifting message would affect IOC officials' impressions of the bid. But his contradictory remarks also make it difficult for critics to pin him down.

Daley said repeatedly Friday he wanted to correct the record to reflect that he had not signed the contract, as if there was a mistaken public perception that he had already put pen to paper.

But the media have consistently reported that he had only told the IOC that Chicago would sign at a later date.

dheinzmann@tribune.com

dpblake@tribune.com

Copyright © 2009, [Chicago Tribune](#)