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A Super Bowl trip tempts some Georgia politicians

GEORGIA-POLITICS

By [Greg Bluestein](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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Some of Georgia's top politicians are planning a trip to watch the Atlanta Falcons play in the Super Bowl for the first time in nearly two decades, even if it means facing questions about using taxpayer money to pay for the journey to Houston.

Gov. Nathan Deal's office said he and his wife, Sandra, will be making a one-day trip to the game Sunday that won't rely on state tax dollars to foot the bill. Earlier this month, he decided against attending President Donald Trump's inauguration by [citing taxpayer expense of about \\$20,000 for the trip](#).

"Governor Deal and the first lady are proud of our Atlanta Falcons and will travel to Houston to show their support and cheer our home team on to victory," Deal spokeswoman Jen Talaber Ryan said. "They depart Sunday morning and will immediately return following the game. No state taxpayer dollars will be used to cover the costs." Deal's staff wouldn't say whether the governor will use personal funds to pay for the trip, or if there will be taxpayer-funded security with him.

The governor will be joined by Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed at meetings with National Football League executives and the Super Bowl Host Committee to talk about the city's preparations to host the event in 2019.

The mayor, who hosted a [raucous pep rally for the team last week at City Hall](#), said he wants to celebrate a team whose players have "worked their tails off all year long" and are on the verge of the first NFL championship in Atlanta history. When asked whether taxpayers will pay for his trip, Reed said, "I don't know, but I'm going."

Top state legislators have long [had access to thousands of dollars](#) in tickets to watch football games, pro wrestling matches and monster truck races from luxury boxes at the Georgia Dome. But it's more unusual for them to travel to away games. And with [hotels jammed](#) and [nosebleed tickets starting at \\$2,000](#) a pop, that trip to Houston won't come cheap.

Some politicians have found other ways to get to big events. When Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker ventured to Atlanta this month with his family to watch his Green Bay Packers get dismantled by the Falcons, [he had the Republican Governors Association](#) pick up the expenses.

Some watchdog activists questioned the trips. Manny Arora, a prominent Atlanta attorney, said he found it "very troubling" that two politicians who won't be in office when Atlanta is hosting the NFL championship are attending meetings to prepare for the game. Reed's second term ends in January 2018; Deal will be out of office in January 2019.

"It's not valid. The higher-ups who are going won't even be in power when the Super Bowl comes here," Arora said. "You'd be hard-pressed enough to say that city and state staff are not competent enough to host the game without their help."

Other leading politicians are taking a pass at the game. Aides to [House Speaker David Ralston](#), Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, Secretary of State Brian Kemp and Attorney General Chris Carr said the officials won't attend the game. Ditto for U.S. Sens. David Perdue and Johnny Isakson.

“I’ve got a refrigerator at home, a good TV,” Isakson said, “and just in case it’s not a great game I don’t want to have to walk out of the stadium sad.”