

# Arizona Daily Star

[https://tucson.com/opinion/column/article\\_234f7272-3a4b-4368-b756-e8b0f7b575bf.html](https://tucson.com/opinion/column/article_234f7272-3a4b-4368-b756-e8b0f7b575bf.html)

## Local opinion: Why Project Blue won't go away

### Continue to say no to Project Blue

Dee Maitland Special to the Arizona Daily Star

*The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer.*

Project Blue remains in the news. Rumor has it they are exploring Marana as a possible location if they fail with the City of Tucson. What is most concerning is this quote from the front page of a recent Star article:

“Project Blue developer Beale Infrastructure has declined to answer questions from reporters or public officials about where it intends to get water for its first data-center complex, planned for 290 acres on the far southeast side near the Pima County Fairgrounds.”



*Dee Maitland*

Beyond concerns about water and electricity use, it was the original nondisclosure agreement that caused public opposition. The lack of transparency remains. As a retired commercial banker and past employee of the FDIC, I witnessed firsthand how corporations influenced politicians and battled against regulators. There are no fines or penalties our elected officials can design that will protect us when Project Blue violates agreements. The owners have built penalty assumptions into their cost of doing business and still see a profit, or they wouldn't continue pursuing the project.

Time and time again, our governments have failed to hold corporations responsible for bad actions and to gain meaningful compensation for victims. Now tech bros are giving millions to politicians, and we have less influence and fewer options with which to defend ourselves. Here are examples of past government failures in protecting us from rabid capitalists:

1. In the 1980s, when I began my banking career, anti-government politicians repealed a number of laws governing savings and loan banks. S&Ls were allowed to expand beyond traditional home mortgage lending. My employer became the primary source of funds for junk bond investment schemes. The Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) did not understand the new financial instruments and eventually had to pay out \$3.25 billion when the bank failed in

1991. Many S&Ls made similarly unwise loans, which resulted in over a third of them failing. Very few bank executives suffered legal, financial or professional consequences.

2. In 1999, the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 spawned another wave of carelessness and greed. Banks were allowed to merge with investment firms, and the fun began. They created dubious mortgage-backed securities, which led to the 2008 nationwide financial crisis. Big banks got bailed out, and over 10 million families lost their homes. Republicans are again talking about loosening bank regulation and eliminating the FDIC, which protects the deposits of us little guys.

3. In the same era as the S&L crisis, the Enron Corporation failed. The company had maintained fraudulent financial statements for years that their regulators did not spot. Employees who lost \$2 billion in their 401Ks received a payout of \$85 million or \$1,300 per employee. A corporate law firm earned \$680 million off the litigation. Fortunately, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act came as a result. If not overturned by today's anti-government legislators, it will continue to enforce honest accounting by corporations and exact stiff penalties.

4. Finally, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had neither the funding nor the talent to supervise Purdue Pharma. Over 500,000 overdose deaths are attributed to the company's false and aggressive marketing of Oxycodone. The owners of the company, the Sacklers, remain rich and free with their personal wealth protected by beneficial bankruptcy laws. In August 2021, US Representatives introduced the Sackler Act to assure owners' personal assets are not excluded from lawsuits against their companies. To date, Republicans have refused to pass it.

We cannot count on laws or government assistance should Project Blue violate its contract or harm our environment. As one letter to the editor pointed out: No amount of money can replace our water if lost. Just as no amount of money can return family members who died of Oxycodone; give housing to foreclosed families; or ease the retirement woes of Enron employees. We will never have enough time, expertise, money, legal resources or political influence to battle companies like Amazon. They will remain wealthy, and we will have squandered our children's future. Continue to say "no" to Project Blue.

*Dee Maitland is a retired commercial banker, past ombudsman for the FDIC and 2019 Public Voices Fellow with the Op-Ed Project.*