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Airline seeks harder look at contracts

A top Southwest Airlines official on Tuesday asked the Dallas City Council to defer a vote on two multimillion-dollar no-bid contracts at Love Field, expressing concern that deals are too sweet to the contractors and could be better for the city and the airport.

The contracts would extend long-term control of most concession space to companies tied to state Rep. Helen Giddings, U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson and longtime Dallas political donor Gilbert **Aranza**.

In a frank letter to City Manager Mary Suhm and Mayor Tom Leppert, Bob Montgomery, vice president for properties at Southwest, questioned why City Hall is moving so quickly. The renovated Love Field terminal isn't scheduled to be complete until 2014.

"We do not understand why this issue is being fast-tracked through the Council. ... We have time to study the best outcome to meet Love Field's concessions needs and what is best for Love Field's patrons," Montgomery wrote.

Southwest is the major private financial backer of the renovations and has a huge stake in the terminal's success, so Montgomery's words are expected to be weighed with care at City Hall.

The city's airport and economic development staff have proposed granting more than half the concession space in the renovated terminal to the current concessionaires.

Sales of books, magazines and other newsstand items are controlled by Hudson Retail-Dallas, a joint venture in which Giddings, a DeSoto Democrat, holds a 25 percent stake. Fifteen percent of Hudson Retail is held by a blind trust that controls assets for Johnson, a Dallas Democrat.

The food and beverage contract is held by Gilbert **Aranza**, a former leader of the Dallas Citizens Council and longtime contributor to local politicians.

The contracts up for a vote today guarantee Giddings' and **Aranza**'s companies more than half of all new concession space in the renovated airport and are written for a term of 12 years. But the deals include an interim period during construction and an extension that would extend their total length to nearly 20 years.

Leppert said earlier this week that he fears the deals would stifle competition.

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