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Love Field concession contracts a good deal, says study commissioned by current vendor

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A study of concessions contracts at Dallas [Love Field](#) has concluded that a plan to award two long-term deals to the airport's current vendors without a competitive bid is the best deal for the city.

The study, commissioned by one of the vendors with a contract at stake, was completed by Richard Briesch, a professor at Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business. Briesch wrote that he was hired to do an independent study of one of the two contracts that have been hotly debated at City Hall. He determined that the contract is "a good deal for the city even if it means reducing competition over the short run."

The City Council is divided along racial lines over whether to grant the contracts for more than half of all concessions space at a renovated Love Field to two companies, Star Concessions and Hudson Retail Dallas.

Hudson is owned in part by state Rep. Helen Giddings and a blind trust that controls the assets of U.S. Rep. [Eddie Bernice Johnson](#), both Democrats. Star – which does business at Love as Dallas Love Field Joint Venture – is controlled by Gilbert Aranza, a longtime donor to the campaigns of many City Council members.

Under a plan crafted by city staff, the current contracts with Star and Hudson would be extended for three years, and new contracts for a term of at least 12 years would be issued.

Briesch's study – commissioned by Aranza's company – concluded that such extensions aren't unusual, something opponents of the deals have questioned

Soon after Briesch's 24-page paper was released to the media and council members, [Mayor Tom Leppert](#) called it a "study for pay."

Leppert has led an effort to open all concession space at the airport to a competitive bid process.

"Instead of examining the current proposal, the researcher should have examined what concession model is best for our new Love Field Terminal when it opens to the public and to non-stop direct service across the country in 2014," Leppert wrote.

[Ken Carter](#), a spokesman for Dallas Love Field Joint Venture, said the study does not address the political connections of the current vendors.

"He was going into the merits of what this contract was about," Carter said .

Leppert and many northern Dallas council members have expressed concern that the contracts erode

confidence in government because they reward politicians and a major political donor.

Minority council members, meanwhile, have argued the contracts were thoroughly vetted by city staff and passed unanimously by a council committee before being called into question this year.

Staffers are crafting several options for the council to consider. A briefing on those plans is set for Aug. 18.