

EDITORIAL: OTB ticket questions remain

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In her bid to become the next judge in Niagara County, District Attorney Caroline Wojtaszek has yet to answer one nagging question.

It's the same question her husband, current Western Regional Off-Track Betting Corp. president and former Niagara County GOP Chairman Henry Wojtaszek, appears reluctant to answer as well.

Here it is: "Did either Wojtaszek or any members of their family attend Buffalo Bills or Buffalo Sabres games using tickets or access to luxury suites paid for by OTB, which is supposed to be a public benefit corporation?"

In the run-up to last month's primary election, this newspaper asked both of the Wojtaszeks for an answer.

Neither responded.

Similarly, earlier in the month, the Buffalo News pressed Henry Wojtaszek for an answer and he refused to reply.

Some may recall, months ago now, former Gazette reporter and current Investigative Post reporter Phil Gambini asked Henry Wojtaszek, while a WGRZ Channel 2 news camera was rolling, if he or his family members ever attended sporting events on the public's dime through OTB.

Wojtaszek's response: "The tickets are used for the proper promotional purposes."

The residents of all Western New York counties served by Off-Track Betting deserve an honest answer here.

As was reported by Investigative Post and this newspaper, OTB spends more than \$300,000 a year on suites to Sabres and Bills games and concerts while racking up significant tabs for food and drinks.

OTB officials have claimed that the tickets and extras are used to entice high rollers at the entity's casino in Batavia, but records show OTB execs, staffers and their associates have also helped themselves to the free tickets and concessions.

In recapping previous reporting done by OTB, the entity, along with other Sabres suite holders, last season charged up to \$130 for a bottle of liquor, \$40 for a six-pack of beer and \$53 for a pizza during Sabres games and, in total, dropped \$85,690 for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 hockey seasons. That's on top of \$332,500 spent to lease the suite for those two seasons.

These costs impacts residents in Western New York communities like Niagara County as money spent on such things could instead be delivered back to host counties who are responsible for underwriting OTB operations.

In a county that is home to cash-strapped and financially challenged communities, why wouldn't local leaders push an organization like OTB to offer more of a return on investment by spending less on costly events that are attended by OTB execs and their associates at significant expense and questionable returns in terms of courting high rollers?

As a county official, Caroline Wojtaszek is barred from the county's ethics rules from accepting any gift above \$75. As an aspiring judge, she should be held to an even higher standard in terms of accepting of high-value gifts of any kind.

We can't say, for sure, at this point whether she personally took advantage of her husband's position at OTB by attending any of these sporting events at the expense of the public benefit corporation he oversees.

What we do know, for sure, is that neither Wojtaszek has been willing for months now to answer direct questions about it, which is troubling.

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