



[Maziarz campaign committee pays \\$2,500 fine in settlement as Niagara GOP feud reignites](#)

(New York)

The state Board of Elections has fined the campaign committee of former State Sen. George D. Maziarz \$2,500 for a minor finance violation that reflects a decade-long feud within Niagara County politics that has no apparent end in sight.

In a Tuesday civil settlement agreement obtained by The Buffalo News, the Committee to Elect Maziarz State Senate admitted no guilt in a probe launched by the Board of Elections. But it acknowledges several technical violations in financing 2020 primary campaign literature that discouraged votes for Caroline A. Wojtaszek, the former Niagara County district attorney who won her bid for Niagara County judge.

Though Maziarz and Wojtaszek's husband – former Niagara County Republican Chairman Henry F. Wojtaszek – at one time were close friends forming the nucleus of a powerful Niagara County GOP machine, the new development represents the latest chapter in the region's longest and most bitter political blood feud. Maziarz says letters financed by the independent expenditure committee he formed against Caroline Wojtaszek called the Committee to Reform Niagara stem from his outspoken criticism of the Western Regional Off Track Betting Corp., headed by Henry Wojtaszek and at one time employing much of Maziarz's estranged inner circle from Niagara County.

"I did a whole lot to make WROTB a success, but not so with the executives and board members filling their pockets with taxpayer money," the former senator said Friday. "They keep trying to silence me. I'm sure they're behind this complaint."

Henry Wojtaszek refuted Maziarz's latest allegation, labeling the OTB claim "preposterous" and referred to a Maziarz history of election law problems.

It all points to a smoldering feud reignited.

"Once again George Maziarz doesn't think the rules apply to him and for the third time in his career, he is guilty of serious campaign violations," Wojtaszek said Friday. "It shows how unhinged he's become and proves no one should take him seriously. He is simply carrying out a personal vendetta against me by attacking my wife Caroline.

Former state senator files lawsuit against OTB, criticizes officials' inaction

Former state senator files lawsuit against OTB, criticizes officials' inaction

Former State Sen. George Maziarz announced Thursday a civil lawsuit accusing leadership of Western Regional Off-Track Betting, a public benefit corporation that offers legal online betting on horse racing, of misappropriating public funds for personal use.

"How pathetic," he added. "Worse, he consistently breaks the law to do it."

Elections officials say the confidential nature of Chief Enforcement Officer Michael J. Johnson's probe prohibits disclosing the origin of the complaint. But The News obtained the September 2020 affidavit that brought the matter to the Board of Elections. It was submitted by Caroline Wojtaszek in her capacity as district attorney after a citizen requested an investigation, with the affidavit indicating referral to the board would avoid any conflict of interest.

Though Henry Wojtaszek once was a Maziarz protege and heir apparent to his influence in Niagara County, it all disintegrated during a series of federal and state investigations that resulted in several minor guilty pleas and ongoing acrimony.

In 2018, for example, Maziarz pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor election law violation before an Albany County judge and paid a \$1,000 fine after facing five felony election law violations brought by then-state Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman. The plea deal headed off a scheduled trial that was expected to expose much of Niagara County's inside politics, and followed immunity granted to a host of major Niagara County figures.

Henry Wojtaszek has encountered his own problems with the Board of Elections, pleading guilty in 2017 to a misdemeanor election law violation.

But the latest rupture in the once solid GOP organization stems from the Maziarz committee that sponsored mailings in 2020 that labeled Caroline Wojtaszek a "pro-abortion, pro-gun control Democrat" during the Republican primary election she won.

"She literally rode the Barack Obama campaign bus to Ohio to get out the vote on his behalf," Maziarz told voters in one letter. "She campaigned for Hillary Clinton against President Trump, too – even as 57% of Niagara County's citizens voted to Make America Great Again."

Also in 2020, after an 18-month investigation by Monroe County District Attorney Sandra Doorley acting as a special prosecutor, Maziarz failed to obtain bid rigging charges against his old friend. Maziarz had claimed Henry Wojtaszek pressured county officials in 2014 to deliver a grant writing contract to Four Points Communications, headed by a former aide.

"Although I believe that the company's consulting practices were suspect," Doorley said then, "they do not rise to the level to warrant criminal prosecution."

The former senator also failed to spur Bar Association disciplinary action against Henry Wojtaszek in connection with the Four Points probe. Since then Maziarz has been outspoken in criticism of the public benefit corporation that Wojtaszek serves as president, noting Friday he met with investigators from the Attorney General's Office in mid-September who are probing his complains.

And in July, he withdrew a civil lawsuit accusing OTB leadership of misappropriating public funds for personal use.

This week's Board of Elections agreement also included Leslie Stolzenfels, treasurer of the Maziarz Senate account, which has more than \$583,000 remaining almost eight years after Maziarz retired. The agreement signed by all parties acknowledges the Maziarz Senate account paid \$11,532 to produce and circulate the Maziarz letter against Caroline Wojtaszek. But the violation occurred because the Committee to Reform Niagara failed to register as an independent expenditure committee and failed to file proper financial disclosure statements.

The stipulation admits no criminal or civil liability, and agrees there was no coordination with any other candidate.

Maziarz said Friday he agreed to the settlement and amended past campaign finance reports because he would have otherwise faced at least \$10,000 in legal fees.

[Trial begins for former head of State Police Association accused of embezzling money for affair](#) (Massachusetts)

Opening statements began Monday in the trial of the former head of the State Police Association of Massachusetts.

Dana Pullman is accused of using its funds as his own personal piggy bank to pay for extravagant meals, a trip to Florida, a down payment for his car and gifts for a woman with whom he was having an affair.

Federal prosecutors accuse Pullman of crafting a kickback scheme with a Beacon Hill lobbying firm run by Anne Lynch.

In 2019, Pullman and Lynch both pleaded not guilty to several charges, including obstruction of justice and wire fraud.

Pullman stepped down from the State Police Association of Massachusetts in 2018 and retired weeks later.

After the opening arguments, one witness took the stand and that witness will continue their testimony on Tuesday.

Ethics commission shelves lobbying complaint against Austin Pets Alive! employee (Texas)

The Ethics Review Commission has opted not to move forward with a lobbying complaint against a member of the city's Animal Advisory Commission who also works in a governmental affairs job for Austin Pets Alive.

Last week the ethics commission voted 4-4 on a motion that would have forwarded to the city attorney the complaint filed by Leslie Padilla against Katie Jarl, who has served on the Animal Advisory Commission since 2019 and worked for Austin Pets Alive since January 2021. The tie vote fell two votes short of the number required to move the complaint out of the preliminary hearing stage.

Padilla said she filed her complaint based on the likelihood that Jarl was involved in substantial lobbying activity for APA in 2021 when it was negotiating with the city for a long-term lease for the Town Lake shelter property. After talks that stretched through most of the year, an [agreement was reached](#) in November 2021.

City laws bar a lobbyist registered with the city from serving on boards and commissions, with criteria for registration involving how much money a potential lobbyist was paid in a quarter and if their total time spent lobbying on city actions totaled 26 hours in a quarter.

Padilla first filed a letter of complaint with the city clerk's office in May 2022 after receiving more than 200 pages of emails and other documents in response to her public information request about Jarl and one of her co-workers in the shelter negotiations. She filed her ethics complaint in June.

“The time period I’m concerned about is when she started working for APA as a director of government affairs and policy. This is important in this case because ... the city was trying to negotiate a new license agreement for use of the Town Lake animal shelter,” she said. “The key question here is the threshold for when a lobbyist must register.”

Jarl and her attorney said her lobbying work is focused mostly on the state level with many of her colleagues handling most of the talks with City Council members and city staff throughout 2021. Jarl said she was on occasion included in meetings related to city business including the shelter talks, with an informal audit of the meeting time and time spent on electronic communications totaling less than 16 hours in each of three fiscal quarters covered by Padilla's complaint.

"I take ethics laws very seriously. I have been registered as a nonprofit lobbyist with the state of Texas for the last decade. I review those rules every year," she said. "I have actually been working on city ordinances a very small amount over the last 12 to 15 years as well and I have reviewed that code and statute many times, and every single time because city work is such a very small part of my job ... it just has never reached the threshold."

Commissioners and Jarl confirmed that Padilla's documentation presented many instances of lobbying activity with city officials and staff, yet not enough to clearly prove the need to register with the city that would have made her membership on a city commission a possible criminal activity.

"The burden is entirely on the complainant at this point, and our standard to vote this forward is probable cause, not could it possibly be this or possibly have happened?" said Commissioner Debra Danburg, who voted against moving the complaint forward. "The burden is on the complainant to demonstrate this as probable events without any other standard than probable."

Commissioner Sidney Williams, who voted to move the complaint to the city attorney, said the likelihood that Jarl spent time beyond scheduled meetings and emails on city-related matters made it possible that the city attorney should be asked to open an investigation.

"We just have to have a reasonable belief that it has occurred, and so what we are struggling with is a definition regarding certainty, but this is the lowest standard out there," he said. "We need to take a look at these facts and just bear in mind that there doesn't have to be evidence that (the violation) actually occurred."

[Nash seeking clarity on lobbying rules after ethics decision](#) (Maryland)

Oct. 5—Frederick Alderwoman Katie Nash will not challenge a decision by the city's Ethics Commission that some of her professional lobbying activities violated city rules in court and is seeking guidance for future work.

The Ethics Commission released a decision in September finding that Nash, a lobbyist registered with the state, improperly emailed coordinators for various city Neighborhood Advisory Councils and others, encouraging them to raise concerns with the county about plans to shift coverage of paramedic services in parts of the city.

Nash, D, was a paid lobbyist for the International Association of Firefighters Local 3666 when she sent out emails and press releases in June that were critical of the county's plans to move an advanced life support unit from its location on Montevue Lane to the new Northgate Fire Station on Thomas Johnson Drive that opened in June.

The decision found that Nash improperly asked the NAC coordinators to raise their concerns with the county, knowing that her position as an alderwoman would give the request added weight.

The commission noted that Nash testified that she was not specifically using the NACs to advocate for her client.

Rather, her email went to community leaders, some of whom happened to be NAC coordinators, Nash told the commission.

Nash also told the commission that her email did not use her city title or anything to give the idea that she was speaking on behalf of the city and that she "disclosed that she was speaking for a client."

County Executive Jan Gardner, D, filed a complaint with the Ethics Commission in June, in a personal rather than official capacity.

Nash wrote in an email to the News-Post on Tuesday that her attorney is preparing correspondence with the commission to clarify its guidance in the decision that Nash avoid engaging in any lobbying on matters with a "substantial direct effect" on city residents or services.

Nash's attorney, Paul Flynn, declined to comment when contacted Tuesday about what type of clarification he would seek.

Nash said she won't pursue any legal action to change the commission's decision.

"As it turns out, the only appeals process available in situations like this is to appeal in Court — dragging this out wouldn't be the best thing for the City or my family so we are not going to pursue that option," Nash wrote.

But the city's ethics ordinance is based closely on the state's applicable ethics law and doesn't provide for judicial review of a decision by the Ethics Commission, Acting City Attorney Rachel Nessen wrote in an email Tuesday.

"If someone wanted to appeal an Ethics Commission decision, that person would need to determine what type of action, if any, to file in court," Nessen wrote.

Nash wrote that she also followed up with the city's staff to ask that information about avoiding conflicts be made available to candidates when they file.

The Ethics Commission issued Nash an advisory opinion on Nov. 3, 2021, — the day after her election but before she was sworn in as an alderwoman. The commission warned that although the ethics ordinance didn't prohibit an elected official from working as a lobbyist, "it has the potential to raise several concerns."

Nash was elected with the most votes of any aldermanic candidate, becoming the president pro tem of the Board of Aldermen.