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# BNCVB refutes EC Comp's audit

**Business First - by James Fink**

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The **Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau** disputes most of the findings from an audit of its operations by Erie County Comptroller **Mark Poloncarz**.

Poloncarz took issue with several items his staff found during its audit of the CVB from 2008 until June 2010. The comptroller said he and his staff found the funding contract between the CVB and Erie County confusing and, depending on several factors, the bureau either finished 2008 and 2009 with budget surpluses — as he contends — or deficits as the CVB says.

In addition, Poloncarz said that the CVB's board of directors meeting minutes were not always approved, some directors failed to make requisite number of meetings, no annual meetings were held in 2008 and 2009 and some bidding procedures were not clearly defined.

Poloncarz said the Buffalo Niagara CVB when compared to other bureaus like those in Albany and Niagara Falls, among others, spent percentage-wise more on salaries than its counterparts.

The comptroller took issue with the strong influence Erie County Executive **Chris Collins** has on the bureau and its board makeup. Poloncarz said Collins has the ability to appoint six directors and the potential to influence another three board appointments.

"In comparison to other convention and visitor bureaus, which have little or no governmental influence, the county executive has a tremendous amount of influence over the CVB's activities," Poloncarz said.

Poloncarz is being eyed, in some quarters, as potential challenger to Collins in the November general election.

**Dottie Gallagher-Cohen**, CVB president and chief executive officer, took issue with many of Poloncarz's findings.

Gallagher-Cohen said in some cases, Poloncarz made unfair comparisons. The Buffalo Niagara CVB not only books conventions, meetings and special events, it oversees the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center and serves as the county's tourism and hospitality marketing agency.

It's \$3 million annual budget, which comes primarily from bed tax revenues collected by area hotels, is dwarfed by larger budgets from such cities as Pittsburgh.

"Our folks are doing a lot more, with a lot less, than many of our competing cities," Gallagher-Cohen said.

The CVB has drafted a detailed response to Poloncarz's 34-page report. They expect to meet with the comptroller to review the report soon.

"Right now, we think his methodology is flawed and we want to meet with him," Gallagher-Cohen said.