



Casino tab tale plays wild card

Contested bill wasn't hers, says Blute

Maybe Robi Blute was betting that no one would ask. Or perhaps she thought she'd roll the dice and let the chips fall where they may.

When I caught up with the state Senate candidate by telephone this week, she said she was headed to Wal-Mart to buy a pair of pantyhose because she ruins so many of them on the campaign trail. She then proceeded to tapdance through a string of questions — albeit uncomfortable ones — about an old gambling debt.



I spoke with Ms. Blute after learning of her rather bizarre response during a recent candidates forum at Webster Square Towers. Asked by a panelist from

radio station WTAG to explain the well-publicized debt she incurred in 1998 at Foxwoods Casino — a debt she paid only after being sued in court — this is what Ms. Blute said:

"It was a personal debt. It was a bill that was sent to me that wasn't even mine. No one even bothered to ask me. I got some other resident from Shrewsbury's bill. And when push came to shove everything was settled out fine. But it was a personal debt. Like paying Filene's three weeks late ... I tell people if someone wants to know something of me, I have an open-door policy."

Maybe I'm dense, but was Ms. Blute telling voters that she received a bill that wasn't hers and she went ahead and paid it nonetheless? Is that any way for a Republican to behave?

Ms. Blute is involved in a hotly contested race with Democrat Edward M. Augustus for the seat being vacated by Sen. Guy W. Glodis, who's running for sheriff. Both sides have been adept at hurling accusations at each other, with Ms. Blute hammering away at Mr. Augustus' Boston ties and liberal leanings, and Mr. Augustus criticizing his

opponent's "half-baked" ideas.

And they're both falling all over themselves to stress their similarities to Mr. Glodis, as though that's somehow a good thing, which is why politics can be so darn confusing.

The wife of former congressman and Massport honcho Peter I. Blute, Ms. Blute made headlines in 2000 when Foxwoods Casino sued her for \$10,000 in gambling debts. A private citizen at the time, Ms. Blute took a \$10,000 line of credit at the Connecticut casino in 1998; in 2001, the judgment with interest was \$11,411 in Worcester District Court.

Back in 2000, the colorful and outspoken Ms. Blute let her husband do the talking when the media inquired about the debt, with Peter Blute calling Foxwoods "money-hungry casino operators" who lure gamblers into spending too much.

This week, Ms. Blute also blamed Foxwoods for her debt, saying the casino prolonged the matter by sending her the wrong bill.

"They kept sending me notices for another guy in Shrewsbury," she said. "By the time we got that straightened out, they started taking me to task ... But they sent me the wrong bills, and it was their fault."

I asked Ms. Blute why she never offered this explanation back in 2000. She said she did, but no one printed it, presumably as part of a vast left-wing media conspiracy.

But since Ms. Blute opened the door by stressing her open-door policy, I asked if she had also bounced a check for \$7,500 in 1998 at Mohegan Sun Casino. Initially she said she didn't, but in a subsequent conversation said there must have been a mix-up when she was closing out her account — a mix-up she blamed on Mohegan Sun — and that it was fixed right away.

But I didn't understand why, if that was the case, the Mohegan Tribe filed a complaint against her in May 2000, demanding payment of the \$7,500, and that an arbitrator settled the case for \$1,787 in October of that year.

"They probably just put (the check) in

the wrong checking account," Ms. Blute said.

I should mention here that copious documents related to Ms. Blute's gambling records were spoon-fed to me by an Augustus supporter, who was apparently struck by an urge to alert the populace to the pitfalls inherent in Connecticut gambling casinos. Sort of a public service, if you will.

The Augustus campaign also managed to gain ink over the weekend by claiming, along with James P. McGovern's congressional campaign, that hundreds of lawn signs were vandalized last week in a move that appeared to be "politically motivated." The claim gains points for media coverage, if not originality, but Mr. Augustus isn't a protege of the politically savvy Mr. McGovern for nothing.

This week, Ms. Blute urged me to call James A. Gage of Holden, the "independent arbitrator" who handled her Foxwoods debt. Ms. Blute stressed that Mr. Gage was an objective party and could clear up any confusion, but when I called him he acknowledged that he had actually been paid by Ms. Blute to represent her interests, at which point I was very interested in speaking to him.

But I did indicate to Mr. Gage that his client's explanation for the bounced check was somewhat confusing, and he replied, "Frankly, the casino mixed my client's account up with another account."

He added, "that's why this case was settled in my client's favor and when we demanded a formal apology it was given both written and verbally."

I called Mr. Augustus yesterday to see if he wanted to weigh in, but he indicated that he wished to take the high road and didn't want to "get in the middle" of the gambling issue, although he did dub his opponent's answer at the forum "weird."

But with the Nov. 2 election just a week away, I'll wager we haven't heard the last from the cantankerous 2nd Worcester District. ■