

National groups call on Fort Lauderdale lawmakers to disavow Mayor's homophobic remarks

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Ten national LGBT civil rights organizations are calling on Fort Lauderdale and Broward County commissioners to denounce recent homophobic remarks by Mayor Jim Naugle (pictured)

The letters were signed by the leaders of the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, the National Center for Lesbian Rights; Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; The National Lesbian Health Organization; the Mautner Project; Pride At Work, AFL-CIO; Out & Equal Workplace Advocates; Family Pride; Faith In America.

The national leaders in the letters said that because Naugle's comments were made in his capacity as mayor other local politicians must respond "otherwise your collective silence may be taken by others to mean that his comments actually do reflect the views of your city, not just the mayor's own personal and deplorable prejudices."

Early last month Naugle claimed that gay sex is rampant in public washrooms on the beach and called for the city to spend a quarter-million dollars on a replacement toilet that he said would end the problem.

The remarks angered the city's gay community which launched a "flush Naugle" campaign to flood his office email with "virtual toilet paper" and the police department said there had been only one arrest at the toilet on the stretch of beach known for its gay sunbathers.

Last week Naugle announced he would issue an apology, but instead turned it into another broadside against the gay community. (

The conservative Democrat said he was apologizing for what he claimed was underestimating the problem and that the county had the highest rate of new HIV/AIDS cases involving men having sex with men in the country.

Naugle then suggested the county tourism office should rethink its ad campaigns that welcome gays to the area.

The letters urged members of both the Fort Lauderdale City Commission and the Broward County Commission publicly affirm the area welcomes gay tourists.

Fort Lauderdale's City Commission is on summer vacation and will not return until September. The County Commission meets next Tuesday.

A letter of gay support would not only be welcome by area gays but also Fort Lauderdale's tourist industry which depends heavily on gay money.

Fort Lauderdale ranked No. 6 among gay travelers last year, and accounted for about 11 percent of Broward's \$8.5 billion tourism industry.

So concerned is the tourism industry over the potential fallout the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau is using paid media watchers in New York and Europe to see how far the story is spreading.

So far it has been covered extensively in the US and European gay press, but has not attracted much attention in the mainstream media.

Still, an unscientific poll last week by 365gay.com of nearly 1000 readers found that 75 percent would take Naugle's remarks into consideration when considering Fort Lauderdale as a vacation destination.