

The Miami Herald

Gay leaders condemn Naugle comments

BY STEVE ROTH AUS

August 2, 2007

Sixteen of the nation's most powerful gay leaders on Thursday called for the Broward and Fort Lauderdale commissions to condemn "recent anti-gay comments" of Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jim Naugle.

"We are writing to support UNITE Fort Lauderdale's request that you promptly pass a resolution condemning Mayor Naugle's insulting, hurtful and untrue comments and reaffirming Fort Lauderdale's welcome of and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people," wrote the activists, including the heads of GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), Human Rights Campaign and Log Cabin Republicans.

"While we know that some of you have made individual statements rejecting the mayor's comments and said that he does not speak for you, the reality is that because the mayor made his defamatory comments in his official capacity, it is up to you to officially and formally respond on behalf of the people of Fort Lauderdale," they wrote. "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."

Thursday afternoon, the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida joined the other groups.

"The mayor has a right to engage in free speech and express his prejudices, but others also have that same free speech right to condemn his narrow-mindedness," said Howard Simon, the ACLU's executive director.

A message requesting comment was left for Naugle Thursday afternoon at City Hall. He didn't call back. The mayor recently told The Miami Herald that he never cared about making people angry: "I speak and don't worry about the political consequences."

Broward County Mayor Josephus Eggelletion Jr. said he would not support a resolution condemning Naugle. Eggelletion said that although he might not agree with Naugle's comments, he doesn't want to interfere his with ability to express them.

"That comment may not be the most appropriate thing to say, but he has the right to say it," Eggelletion said.

Last month, Naugle proposed that Fort Lauderdale spend \$250,000 on a single-occupancy toilet for the beach to cut down on men having sex with each other in public bathrooms. Naugle says the problem is rampant; the city reports that since 2005, there have been two arrests for sexual activity in a public restroom.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and one of the 16 letter signers, sent a follow-up e-mail Wednesday night to The Herald:

"One issue that hasn't received much play -- and is, frankly, more egregious than everything else -- is [Naugle's] misrepresentation that Broward had the highest number of new [male-to-male] HIV cases last year in the nation -- which led him questioning the convention and visitors bureau marketing to gay tourists," wrote Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "This is -- to me -- even more egregious than the toilet idiocy."

Foreman backed up his claims by including a report from the Broward Health Department, which shows the number of new male-to male HIV cases in the county declined 19 percent from 567 in 2005 to 459 in 2006; while the number of heterosexual HIV cases increased 16 percent from 130 in 2005 to 151 in 2006.

Miami Herald staff writer Breanne Gilpatrick contributed to this report.