

Tourism ads nixed by governor

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"I'm not sure if there were rules to follow," said Edmonds.

Edmonds said that South Carolina has been promoting international tourism for years by contracting with foreign vendors who, in turn, work with tour operators.

"It appears that this employee, working with our U.K. representative, gave approval for the dollars to be spent," Edmonds said. "That couldn't have happened on the domestic side."

"In the future, we won't be able to have those kinds of people acting with that kind of autonomy and latitude," Edmonds said.

He added, "Going into a new area, a different market or a different way of reaching that market, you have to check with somebody on that. That decision has to come down from the marketing plan."

Governor objects to 'agenda'

In the governor's office, Sawyer said that the state will not promote itself as a tourist destination through campaigns "aimed at a specific group of people."

Sawyer said the "so gay" ad should have been "run up the flagpole," but did not know whether any standard procedures were violated at the time it was approved.

"It defies common sense that someone would sign off on an advertising campaign that controversial," Sawyer said.

Asked whether South Carolina would, for example, position itself as a tourist destination for African-Americans by utilizing black media and promoting vacation spots of relevant cultural interest, Sawyer said that the state does not "get into targeting a specific group that might have a social or political agenda."

Sawyer concluded, "We don't believe that the average South Carolina taxpayer would agree" with advertising the state as a gay tourist destination.

Top chief ordered to check ads

Gov. Sanford mandated that PRT director Chad Prosser will from now on have to personally sign off on all advertising campaigns, Sawyer said.

A total of \$4,942.50 of PRT funding was spent on the "So gay" ads — less than one-half of one-tenth of one percent of PRT's annual budget, which exceeds \$10 million.

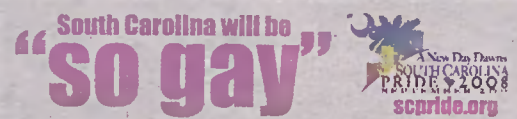
Edmonds told the press that PRT will not pay the bill for the ads.

"I do not believe that it is appropriate to use state tourism marketing funds to support any specific social agenda, nor would we ever knowingly do so," stated Prosser in a press release.

In an interview from his office north of London, Andrew Roberts, the CEO of gay travel agency Amro Worldwide told *Q-Notes* that the ad campaign was planned in partnership with Kirsty Dillury, a British-based PRT contractor.

Amro's eye-catching "so gay" ads promoted several U.S. destinations, mostly gay-friendly cities.

South Carolina was the only state to be



What started out as a joke circulating among S.C. Pride supporters' inboxes has turned into an official S.C. Pride Festival advertising campaign.

included.

Brit tour operator was welcomed

"We think that people may be surprised to see our destination reaching out to the gay market," said Dillury in a statement released before the furor by Out Now, the British agency that prepared the ads.

Dillury said, "We are delighted to be involved with the 'So Gay' campaign in particular as it sends a powerful positive message to everyone that there is nothing wrong at all with a destination being described as 'so gay.'"

"There is no political agenda," Roberts told *Q-Notes*. "It was purely a travel advertisement."

Roberts said that he performed "due diligence" by making a personal inspection of all destinations that are promoted in the poster series, including several South Carolina venues.

"I will not sell any destination I have not visited," Roberts said.

"I was warmly welcomed in South Carolina, and there are more gay bars in South Carolina than in Las Vegas," another destination promoted as "so gay," said Roberts.

The warm Southern hospitality that greeted Roberts in person turned to public scorn and ridicule when images of his posters appeared in South Carolina media.

In a bright side to the story, local and

see *Ad Debt* on 26

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