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## BODY WAXING

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## guest commentary

by Mark Wisniewski :: Charlotte, N.C.

### Does Charlotte's DNC 2012 bid rely on sending the gays to Vegas?

Ed. Note —

An edited version of this commentary was printed in The Charlotte Observer on Aug. 15. The longer, unabridged version was also submitted to *qnotes* and is reprinted below. Since the piece's submission, the Visit Charlotte website has corrected some of the mistakes addressed by this writer.

I've been watching with interest the push for Charlotte to land the honor of hosting the Democratic National Convention in 2012.

Part of the observation is an examination of the Democrat National Committee Platform and where Charlotte stands in rela-

tion to other candidate cities. When it comes to attractions, infrastructure, convenience of travel, and narrative to tell, Charlotte seems to be consistently at the top of every list.

The only obvious and glaring issue I see is the lack of equality, protections and recognition for the city's LGBT citizens. As Matt Comer of *qnotes* has already written, on his website InterstateQ.com, a detailed and wonderful guide to how Charlotte ranks among the four candidate cities in the categories of equality and protections I will avoid a reiteration and simply link the article at the end of this letter, and though I don't like to normally give away an ending, you might all probably want to be aware that Charlotte is a noticeably distant last compared to St. Louis, Cleveland and Minneapolis.

In the hopes of saving everyone time and effort, I have personally written the DNC linking the article inviting them to address this as a strategic weakness in Charlotte's bid. Additionally, I have also raised this issue with the Charlotte bid committee's marketing people on Facebook who said they would forward on to what I would assume would be respectful and necessary parties to address.

To be clear, I'm very glad the the city is a candidate for the convention. We are a wonderful city full of great people with a lot of energy, compassion and drive. Every one of them seem to agree that the Queen City is not treated as an equal among cities and is long overdue the respect and recognition it deserves — of course not as overdue as the city's struggle to provide equality, respect and recognition to its own LGBT citizens, but terribly overdue nonetheless.

What is also wonderful about the city's bid is that it indirectly addresses one of the greatest concerns expressed by the mayor, city manager, and others against offering full protections and benefits for all LGBTs — and let's understand that full LGBT equality includes transgender — which has been the "financial cost."

While I never accepted that reason, mainly because most studies deem the cost minimal compared to existing heterosexual partner benefits — and let's face it, it's a bit offensive to put a price tag on equality, — there is now a greater context of the economics when one considers exactly how much the city stands to lose (I believe \$150 million+ is the oft cited amount) if the DNC would rule out Charlotte for the convention due to city's non-compliance with basic civil rights listed in the DNC platform.

Full protections and equality aside, which is something I am certain that the city is diligently working to finally address, I do want to publicly ask something that has just been bugging me.

Does the ironically nicknamed Queen City see LGBTs as such an unwelcome part of the community that beyond denying them equality and protections that they are also planning on sending us all away?

I know that question may seem a bit odd

and hysterical, but I am just so perplexed at what other reason could there be for the Charlotte travel website to direct LGBT tourists to Las Vegas when they enter the word "gay" in the search box?

I do hope it is a benign reason such as simple incompetence or lack of caring about a community which is what I perceive is the reason that the same site lists only four "gay-friendly" establishments (Does Charlotte have no actual "gay" establishments?) in the nightlife section and not notice that one of the four is out of business, two of the four have long since changed their names and ownership, and one is rumored to be decidedly not "gay-friendly"?

Perhaps this is all just a big misunderstanding. Perhaps the city and its marketers really do want every tourist dollar (including LGBT ones). After all the city did eventually fill out the application that I arranged from the International Lesbian and Gay Travel Association to be sent to them and do proudly display their logo on the city's travel site like a badge of honor. So I do admit I just might be mistaken here.

So thus I am writing this open letter to the city and its marketers in the hopes that they can correct me in not just words and actions. In order to assist, I would like to offer the following suggestions:

1. The city should become a partner in the annual Pride event which last year attracted over 10,000 participants and was one of the largest in the state.
2. Start an active outreach campaign to the LGBT community and hold multiple public information meetings both to notify the community that you want their events, listings and business and to explain how they can partner with you to provide this in timely and suitable manners.
3. Realize that the gay community is not just gay, nor is it white males only. Outreach and communication and promotion of events must include people of color, lesbians and transgenders.
4. Appoint someone as the LGBT community coordinator. This need not be a full time position but it must be someone who can be a contact and responsible party to address concerns for all of the city's multiple agencies. You are all in the business of promoting the city — you should all work together.

The above are simple and mostly low cost ideas that could greatly affect perceptions of the city and its treatment of LGBTs both internally and to outside but important (ahem, tourist dollars and the DNC) constituents.

The real serious changes such as actual equality, protections and benefits are going to take a little but more effort, but I thought I would address that in another letter.

Looking forward to Charlotte getting a lot of movement on these points. ::

— *notes editor Matt Comer's piece on the State of LGBT Charlotte and comparing the four DNC 2012 candidate cities is available at [interstateq.com/archives/4192/](http://interstateq.com/archives/4192/).*

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