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Jim DeFede/In My Opinion

## **Hail to the king of the tirade: Joe Arriola**

### **Miami City Manager Joe Arriola was in rare form.**

As the city's Civilian Investigative Panel was inside the commission chambers hearing alleged tales of police abuse and civil rights violations during the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit, Arriola was in the lobby of City Hall threatening one protester while declaring that he personally had the right to bar anyone he wanted from entering a city building as a matter of public safety.

The problem started when Terrence Rothman, 60, tried to enter City Hall. Rothman had previously been arrested for allegedly threatening the lives of City Hall workers. The charges against him were dismissed. The city never bothered to seek a restraining order against him.

Rothman said he wanted to attend the CIP meeting to complain about his arrest.

When Rothman arrived, he was stopped by a security guard and told he couldn't come in because his name (along with his photograph) were on a list of people barred from City Hall.

Lida Rodriguez-Taseff, president of American Civil Liberties Union in Miami, intervened and said that unless the city had a restraining order signed by a judge, Rothman should be allowed in. The guard relented.

Soon, though, word trickled into the CIP meeting that the city had a list of who would not be allowed in the building. Several CIP members expressed concern.

Arriola was in his second-floor office listening to a broadcast of the meeting. When he heard the commotion about this list, he went down to the lobby to investigate for himself.

After conferring with security guards, he spotted community activist Max Rameau. In front of television cameras, Arriola accused Rameau of inciting a group of protesters to attack him and Mayor Manny Diaz during the FTAA summit. Arriola said he and the mayor barely escaped.

At the time, though, Police Chief John Timoney, who was also present, dismissed the event as "street theater," saying Diaz and Arriola were never in danger.

Nevertheless, Arriola was now shouting at Rameau, jabbing his finger in Rameau's face and promising retribution. "I'm going to get you," he shouted.

When someone pointed out that the manager -- on camera -- had just threatened Rameau, Arriola amended his statement: "I am absolutely going to go to court and make sure this man gets

prosecuted for threatening the mayor."

Reporters asked Arriola why the city was barring certain people from the building. One reporter noted that the ACLU had said Arriola needed a judge's order. "Well, you know what?" Arriola said, "I don't think so."

A crowd was now gathering around the manager. Several people started heckling him. One of them, Leo Casino, who is black, yelled, "This is the United States of America. You're not the king."

Rodriguez-Taseff said that at that point, Arriola broke into "a perfectly controlled tirade in Spanish." She claimed he said, "They hate us."

"I took the 'they' to mean black people," Rodriguez-Taseff said.

Ada Rojas, coordinator for the city's office of community relations, strongly disagreed with Rodriguez-Taseff's assessment.

She said it was the hecklers who were making derogatory comments about Cubans, referring to Miami as a "banana republic."

Arriola also denied making any derogatory comments about blacks. "Why would I make a stupid statement like that?" Arriola said. "I'm a hothead, but not like that."

Arriola, however, insisted that Rothman, the man who had allegedly threatened City Hall workers last year, was black and was the same individual who had asked him if he was the king of Miami.

"He is Terrence Rothman," Arriola said.

Tapes show that was actually Leo Casino.

Terrence Rothman is white.

Which of course is classic Arriola. Sometimes black is white and white is black.

As for the confrontation with Rameau, Arriola said: "My temper just got the better of me."