

Mayor Walsh Should Honor St. Patrick by Marching with Veterans for Peace

Posted by Carol Rose, On Liberty

March 2, 2014 08:21 PM

Newly-elected Mayor Marty Walsh should be commended for trying to open Boston's annual St. Patrick's Day parade to all of Boston's residents by brokering an invitation for gay-rights groups to march in the parade.

Like the 5th century saint who drove the mythical snakes and toads from Ireland, Mayor Walsh is trying to drive bigotry out of Boston.

Unfortunately, the mayor has run into opposition by the Allied War Veterans Council of South Boston, the group that organizes the parade. The War Vets made their offer to open the parade contingent on a promise by marchers not to display any signs expressing their sexual orientation or their on-going struggle for equal rights.

Not surprisingly, that's a non-starter for anyone who cares about equality.

"Ninety-nine percent of the people I have talked to find this deal totally unacceptable," said Sylvain Bruni, president of Boston Pride. "It would be putting people back in the closet."

To make matters worse, the War Veterans Council still won't open the annual celebration to another group of Veterans--the Veterans for Peace. Apparently, the fact that the Veterans for Peace also fought for their country doesn't mean anything to the War Veterans Council.

It's their parade, the War Vets reason, and that gives them the right to exclude anyone whose sexual orientation or political views they don't like--even if those views are in support of equality and peace.

It hasn't always been this way. In fact, Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade started out as a city-run event, dating back to 1901--and unofficially to 1737. The parade was effectively privatized in 1947, when then-Mayor James Michael Curley granted the right to run the parade to his political buddies, the Allied War Veterans Council.

When the Veterans for Peace petitioned to have their own parade, the War Vets--led by John "Wacko" Hurley--did not want to share the road. So they went to court and, in 2004, a judge ruled that both Veterans groups get to march, so long as they maintain some separation between them.

In response, the War Vets claimed that, not only should they get to march first, but that the 2004 court ruling mandates that the city deploy street sweepers between the two marchers, effectively clearing the road of spectators and thus ruining the Peace Vets parade. (Full disclosure--the ACLU of Massachusetts has represented the Vets for Peace in their right to march.) Last year, a judge ruled that the city is not required to clear street or the crowds before the second parade passes.

Ideally, Mayor Walsh and his team would find a way for the city to restore the St. Patrick's Day Parade to all the people of Boston. The only way to do that would be for the city to take over the parade--make it a public celebration for all Bostonians to enjoy.

That certainly would honor our city's Irish heritage. Consider this: Ireland's second-largest city, Cork, has permitted gay rights activists to march in their St. Patrick's parade since 1993--showing themselves to be far more tolerant than their American cousins.

Meanwhile, Mayor Walsh and the free-speaking LBGQTQ groups should forego the War Vets half-hearted invitation and instead join the Veterans for Peace march, marching together to drive out the snakes of bigotry and toads of intolerance from our city. That would honor the true spirit of St. Patrick.

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