

CALLING GAY PARADE'S BLUFF

On March 19, two days after New York's St. Patrick's Day parade, Bill Donohue asked officials at the Heritage of Pride parade, New York's annual gay march, if he could enter with his own unit, "Straight is Great."

Donohue's gambit was a ploy: gays had objected to the house rules of the St. Patrick's Day parade barring any unit from honoring anything but St. Patrick—they sought to march under their own banner (the parade also bans pro-life Catholics from marching under their own banner)—so Donohue sought to test their house rules.

The ensuing controversy validated Donohue's point: he objected to their rule requiring him to attend gay "training sessions" as a condition of marching. When he refused, they replied that the rule was "mandatory." The following article, reprinted from Newsmax, explains exactly how this issue unfolded.

My bid to march in The Heritage of Pride parade, New York City's annual gay event, has occasioned many patently false statements. It's time to set the record straight.

Mid-afternoon on March 20, I was interviewed by Steve Malzberg on his Newsmax Internet show about this issue. I was surprised when Steve asked me to respond to the news that the organizers of The Heritage of Pride parade had agreed to allow my proposed unit, "Straight is Great," to march. This was the first I had heard of it. Moreover, no such invitation was ever made to me.

Steve was referring to a Newsmax article by Bill Hoffmann, which was posted at 1:53 p.m. that day, titled, "Donohue Gets Green Light to March in NYC Gay Parade." This was false, but neither Steve nor Bill were to blame. Here is exactly what happened.

On March 19, at 1:09 p.m., I made my initial request to march; I emailed Chris Frederick, the parade's managing director, about my bid. Shortly after midnight (at 12:16 a.m.) an email was sent to me by David Studinski, the march director. He said I had to register, adding, "you must attend Group Leader training to participate."

I didn't field Studinski's late-night email until the morning of the 20th. When I responded at 9:56 a.m. asking questions about participating, little did I know that literally six minutes earlier – at 9:50 a.m. – an article would be posted on the website of Gothamist saying I was welcome to march. But there was a hitch: conditions were announced by Frederick. "He [Frederick] emphasized that Donohue and his fellow Catholic Leaguers can join in what is certainly one of NYC's most joyful parades 'as long as he's not infringing' on other people's beliefs."

Let's stop right there. Studinski never told me what he told Gothamist, but someone, presumably either he or Gothamist – told GLAAD President Sarah Kate Ellis; she put out her own statement shortly after the Gothamist piece appeared.

At about the same time, Ivan Pereira of *amNewYork* was also quoting Studinski. The next day, *Newsday* carried the *amNewYork* story, and, more important, The Associated Press also carried the *amNewYork* story, citing *Newsday*.

None of these people ever contacted me. The AP reported, falsely, "Gay-Marriage Foe to March in NYC Gay Pride Parade."

Never mind that I never agreed to march; I find it ironic that the parade organizers were insisting on certain conditions.

First, I must attend their "training sessions," and second, they announce their right to check my speech.

Not to be misunderstood, I have no problem with parade organizers insisting that marchers refrain from "infringing on

other people's beliefs." This is exactly why the St. Patrick's Day parade organizers do not allow gays, or pro-life Catholics, to march under their own banner: It infringes on the message of honoring St. Patrick.

The hypocrisy is incredible. It should be obvious that these gay activists were only proving my point: all parades have strictures; their content may vary, but house rules are universal.

Adding to the hypocrisy were lesbian writer Jamie Manson and gay activist Michelangelo Signorile. She wrote that I would be carrying a "Gay is Great" sign, which, of course, I never agreed to. He advised parade organizers to insist on celebrating LGBT pride, "so perhaps Donohue has to tweak that banner a bit to say, 'Straights Who Support Gays Are Great,' or 'Catholics Who Support Gays Are Great.'"

Again, this is not what I agreed to. Gays were making up conditions as they went along, and they weren't even associated with the parade.

On March 21, I emailed Studinski saying, "Regarding the requirement that I attend a gay training session as a condition of registration, I object. I don't agree with your rule. Please advise." He wrote back saying this requirement was "mandatory."

Thus did they prove my point, once again. Gay parade organizers have rules just like everyone else, and when someone objects to them, they rightfully refuse not to honor the objections.

Truthfully, I don't care a fig about "training" sessions – if that is what they want, it is their business, not mine. But they have no right to claim victim status when their bid to get others to alter their rules falls flat. Nor do they have a right to misrepresent how this story unfolded.

One more thing. One of the gay parade rules reads: "Nudity. The law prohibits nudity below the waist. Police will be present at the March and it is assumed that they will enforce the law."

Perhaps gay officials can explain why this is the only parade in New York City that feels compelled to issue such a rule. I know why – I have the pictures from the 1994 march – but that is for another time.