

CONTROVERSY MARKS ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE (AGAIN)

It would not be St. Patrick's Day without controversy, and this year was no exception. This time the controversy swirled around New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick. The Catholic League, not surprisingly, had a hand in the turmoil.

The problem began when Spitzer was chosen to address the Friendly Sons on the evening of St. Patrick's Day at their annual dinner. Spitzer is not popular with practicing Catholics in New York because of his ill-fated attempt to shut down the crisis pregnancy centers in the state. As soon as members of the Friendly Sons received their invitation to the dinner—with Spitzer as a featured speaker—they began calling the Catholic League for help.

We immediately issued a news release informing people that Spitzer has never marched in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Indeed, in 2000, when asked if he would march in the parade, he told the New York Post, "No." When pressed, he replied, "It's more a scheduling thing than anything else. I'm not going to march in it. I'll just leave it at that."

Well, the Catholic League did not just leave it at that. It was quite obvious that Spitzer had previously refused to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade because parade officials bar gays from having their own contingent (note: gays have never been barred from marching any more than pro-life Catholics have—it's just that neither group is permitted to have its own unit).

On February 24, we called Spitzer's office to learn whether the Attorney General was planning to march this year. We were told that Spitzer hadn't decided yet and will let us know in a

few weeks. It didn't take long before officials of Friendly Sons, under mounting pressure from the rank and file, revoked Spitzer's invitation. That, however, wasn't enough for the Catholic League.

We still wanted to know whether Spitzer was prepared to address a major dinner on St. Patrick's Day yet not march in the very parade that honors the patron saint of the Archdiocese of New York. So on March 13, we called his office for an answer. We were told the event was never on his calendar. "In other words," we told the media, "he had every intention of going to the dinner but not marching in the parade. Which means he's decided to stiff Catholics."

One more item of interest: when we called the Friendly Sons after Spitzer's invitation was pulled and asked why he wasn't speaking, we were told he was never scheduled to speak in the first place. This is a lie. We have a copy of the invitation.

Despite this unfortunate incident, this year's St. Patrick's Day Parade was as much fun as it always is.