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The Wisconsin Light

Mayor Norquist Joins Gay Bashers And Vetoes Pride Parade Funds

Milwaukee Community Stunned, Disgusted and Outraged



Jerry Johnson

STOP BASHING FOR VOTES— After Milwaukee Mayor Norquist vetoed the \$5,000 for the Gay/Lesbian Pride Parade, 15 activists gathered on very short notice to picket the Mayor's residence the evening of January 22 to protest the veto.

By Terry Boughner and Jamakaya
[Milwaukee]— "I feel beaten, devastated and betrayed," said Allen Eslinger.

Eslinger was speaking of Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist's January 21 veto of the Milwaukee Lesbian/Gay Pride Committee's (MLGPC) request for city festival funds for its annual Pride parade.

In a move that stunned the Gay community, Norquist issued his veto message just hours after the Common Council voted 9-6 to approve the funds. Gays savored their brief victory in the Council chamber, but the mood swiftly turned to bitterness as news of the veto swept the city.

Scott Gunkel, MLGPC President said: "I am astounded and outraged that a supposed friend of the community has stabbed us in the back. He's cowering down to the bigoted Right in time for the election, when he should be leading us against such discrimination."

Kitty Barber, spokeswoman for the Lesbian Alliance of Metro Milwaukee (LAMM), said, "This is a cowardly act by an ignorant man who cares more about his own career than the city he serves."

Barber added: "I think this is an attempt to play our community against

other groups, further dividing a city already in trouble. But it won't work."

His 'Honor's' Veto Message

In his veto message, Norquist stated: "I do not agree with the recommendation by the [Milwaukee Festival] board and the Common Council to fund the Gay Pride Parade."

The Mayor declared that "using taxpayer dollars for this type of parade is inappropriate. It would be as improper as using property taxes to pay for a 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice' parade."

Norquist denied that "tax funding" for the Lesbian/Gay Pride parade was an issue of civil rights, as many Lesbians and Gays see it. "Property tax funding for a parade," Norquist wrote, "is not the cutting edge of civil rights for Gays and Lesbians. The issue here is not civil rights — the issue is the use of property tax dollars."

According to the Mayor, "Parades and festivals are meant to be non-controversial civic celebrations." But this resolution, he stated, has stirred controversy because of the funding for the Pride parade.

Norquist vetoed the entire package of \$200,000 in city festival funds; Events such as the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the Puerto Rican Festival, the Veterans Day Parade, the Riverwest Art Walk and many others also lost their allocations through his veto.

Dahmer Murder Case: Will Milwaukee Ever Respond To The Firebell In The Night?

Commentary by Jamakaya

The Jeffrey Dahmer murder case is a firebell in the night in terms of racism and homophobia in the city of Milwaukee.

The racial divisions which have characterized this case from the beginning seemed in evidence again at the pretrial hearing January 13. The judge, all of the many attorneys on both sides, the sheriff's deputies, the clerical personnel in the courtroom and the hundreds of media people crowding the halls and the press room were almost exclusively white.

The small band of victims' families who quietly filed into the reserved row of seats in the courtroom were exclusively Black and Hispanic. After the hearing they had to practically fight their way into the press room where they had to wait for some time as District Attorney E. Michael McCann and defense attorney Gerald Boyle held forth before the cameras.

Only when a frustrated cry of "Won't someone show some respect for the families?" was uttered by a

conscience-stricken reporter did the D.A. beat a hasty retreat and allow the families to have their say.

They said a lot that day and in the days since. Their message needs to be heard.

They are incredibly frustrated with a system that they believe has given every advantage to Dahmer while ignoring their own needs. They are angry that Dahmer could end up in a state hospital where he could be eligible for release every six months.

They are angry at the media's depiction of their sons as streetwise hustlers, all Gay, all "flirting with danger." And they are particularly angry that they have not been told the whole story about how their loved ones met their fates, and must first hear all the gruesome details in a nationally televised media circus.

Listen to the Voices

"I want to know what happened to my brother from the time Jeffrey Dahmer met him to the time he killed him. I want to know every detail," said a tearful Carolyn Smith.

No remains of her brother Eddie (who was known to his friends as "The Sheik" for his exotic headgear) have ever been recovered. Dahmer identified Eddie as one of his victims after viewing a photo. Police have withheld any other information, reportedly telling his sister: "It was so gruesome. You don't want to know at this time."

"Why do I have to hear it in court in front of millions of people — what he did to my brother — before I actually know? It's my blood," Smith said of her brother.

The repeated claims of D.A. McCann and Boyle that they want to "spare the poor families" more pain don't sit well with Smith.

"I want Mr. Boyle, I want Jeffrey Dahmer and I want E. Michael McCann to stop thinking for me because I know what I want and I know what I feel..."

"From Day 1 they've been playing with our emotions, our feelings, and we're not going to take it anymore," said Smith. "Since Day 1 everything has been to protect Jeffrey Dahmer."

Dorothy Straughter, the mother of 17-year old Curtis Straughter, who was known to his friends in Gay Youth-Milwaukee as "Demetra," also wants more information. "It's not sparing me any not letting me know," she said. "The way I am now, my imagination can run away and it's probably going to drive me crazy."

"My Son Had a Life"

Catherine Lacy, the mother of Oliver Lacy, expressed another concern common among the families: "Everyone wants to talk about what kind of life Jeffrey Dahmer had. I don't give a damn what kind of life Jeffrey Dahmer had."

"My son had a life," she asserted. "There was people that cared about him, and we got robbed of my son. We got robbed of what my son could have given this community. It may not have been much, but it could have been a little bit and that little bit might have helped."

"What it all boils down to is it's the system's fault for not investigating these boys being missing," said Janie Hagen, sister of Richard Guerrero. "They were

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MAYOR JOHN O. NORQUIST

Word out of City Hall is that there are not enough votes to override the Mayor's veto. It would require a 2/3 vote of the Common Council, or 11 votes. It is likely, however, that the entire package will be re-introduced, but the Pride funds will probably be deleted. At press time, Gay leaders were developing a strategy to see if they could yet salvage the funds.

Debate in the Council

Debate in the Common Council was thoughtful, civil and, in some cases, most eloquent. None of the ignorant statements and homophobic slurs which characterized last November's debate at the School Board were in evidence.

Alderman Donald Richards talked about the need to respect diversity in the city of Milwaukee. He said the litmus test of democracy and living in a free country was that "What is fair for one group is fair for all."

"The part that is true about the American melting pot is not that everyone becomes the same in this country," said Richards, "but that we somehow learn to live with each others' differences."

Council President Tom Donegan lectured his colleagues on their improper use of words like "preference."

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Marny Malin

FAMILIES SPEAK OUT— Carolyn Smith, sister of Eddie Smith, and Shirley Hughes, mother of Tony Hughes speak their minds to the press.