LGBT Groups to March in Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade

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Longstanding tension seems to have subsided between the Boston LGBT community and the Allied War Veterans Council of South Boston, which sponsors the annual South Boston St. Patrick's Day Parade each year. In 1994, the Council cancelled the parade after the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Council would not be permitted to exclude the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group of Boston from marching in the parade under a state law prohibiting discrimination on account of sexual orientation in public accommodations.

The following year, the United States Supreme Court turned the SJC's decision on its head, holding that the Council, a private group of citizens, had the right to exclude a group from its parade that expresses a message the Council did not wish to convey, and that requiring them to do so "violate[s] the fundamental First Amendment rule that a speaker has the autonomy to choose the content of his own message and, conversely, to decide what not to say." You can read the Court's decision here.

In December of 2014, the Council voted 5-4 to allow Boston Pride, an LGBT nonprofit organization that produces events and activities throughout the Boston area, and OUTVETS, a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring the contributions and sacrifices of LGBTQ veterans, to march in Sunday's 2015 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Boston. John Hurley, the Council's leader who fought against allowing LGBT participants in the parade since the early 1990's, did not cast a vote on the issue and stepped down from his position as voting member with the Council. In response to the addition of LGBT groups, Mayor Walsh said, "With this year's parade, Boston is putting years of controversy behind us."

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