



## Quinn, Christine b. 1966

by Linda Rapp

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Christine Quinn (center) marching in a Gay Pride event on Staten Island in 2008. Photograph by Thomas Good / NLN. Image appears under the GNU Free Documentation License version 1.2 or later.

Christine Callaghan Quinn is the first woman, the first openly gay person, and the first Irish-American to serve as the Speaker of the New York City Council, and she is intensely proud of all of these parts of her identity. A political force to be reckoned with, Quinn has tackled a diverse range of issues in her tenure on the Council.

Quinn is a native New Yorker, born in Glen Cove, Long Island on July 25, 1966 into a middle-class family. Her father, Lawrence Quinn, was an electrical engineer and a union steward. He is also an ardent Democrat who told his daughter that "you don't get into Heaven unless you can prove that you always paid your rent on time and that you voted Democratic." Because of her father's influence, Quinn took an interest in politics from an early age.

Her mother, Mary Callaghan Quinn, who died in 1982 when Christine was a teenager, pursued a career as a social worker for Catholic Charities. Diagnosed with breast cancer when her two daughters were young, she tried to bring as much richness as she could to her children's lives in the time that she had left. "She wanted us to know everything," Quinn told reporter Meryl Gordon. "There were horseback-riding and French lessons and bird-watching and painting and ballet and marine biology."

Christine Quinn had realized that she was a lesbian while she was a student at a Catholic high school, but she was unable to embrace her identity at the time. Nor could she later, in her years at Trinity College, where she fell in love with another woman but considered the potential relationship doomed. With great effort, she "pushed it away."

She tried dating men but soon recognized the futility of establishing a heterosexual relationship and attempted to reconcile herself to living her life alone. Remaining closeted and without hope of a fulfilling relationship, however, proved an unbearable burden. In the interview with Gordon, Quinn stated that "for almost every person, it becomes untenable. It's impossible for your psyche. It will get you one way or another."

When Quinn came out to her father, an observant Catholic, he was not initially receptive to the news, telling her, "You should never say that again." As time went on, however, his love for his daughter overcame his qualms.

Indeed, Lawrence Quinn has become an ally of the glbtq community and marches at his daughter's side in New York's Gay Pride Parade. He has also become a close friend of Anthony Catullo, the father of Quinn's partner (and since 2011, wife), attorney Kim Catullo.

After college, Quinn first took a job as a lobbyist for an advocacy group dedicated to the building and renovation of structures in New York for affordable housing. She left that position to enter into politics as the campaign manager for Thomas K. Duane in his bid for the New York City Council in 1991. Following his election as the first openly gay member of the Council, she served as his Chief of Staff for five years. She

subsequently became the Executive Director of the New York Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project and while in that position was also named by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to the New York City Police/Community Relations Task Force.

Always proud of her Irish heritage as well as her identity as a lesbian, Quinn has attempted to march in New York's St. Patrick's Day parade. When she tried to join the 1999 parade as a representative of the Lavender and Green Alliance, however, she was arrested for disorderly conduct.

Quinn continued her efforts to be allowed to take part in the parade. In 2006, when she attempted to communicate with the event chairman but was ignored and she was asked by journalists why she would not set the matter of her sexual orientation aside and simply march as an Irish-American, she replied, "I am every day of the week an Irish lesbian. So I can't take part of that and put it on the shelf. It's not the kind of human being I want to be."

Quinn has since boycotted the parade, having been unable to arrive at an accommodation with the organizers, who in 1995 won a United States Supreme Court case that allows them to ban the participation of openly identified glbtq people or groups.

Unable to march openly as a lesbian in the large parade sponsored by the Ancient Order of the Hibernians (affiliated with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York), she has participated in the inclusive parade in Queens for a number of years and served as Grand Marshal in 2008. In addition, Quinn and Cattulo marched in the 2007 St. Patrick's Day parade in Dublin, which also has a history of inclusivity.

Quinn spent St. Patrick's Day 2009 at the White House. At the time she was encouraged by the presence of a number of other glbtq people, including Andrew Tobias, and by President Obama's expression of support for the community.

In 1999 Quinn made her first run for office in a special election to fill the Council seat of Duane, who had been elected to the New York Senate. She won and quickly established a record as a champion on a wide variety of issues, including not only glbtq rights but also women's health, affordable housing, early childhood education, nutrition programs, maintenance and rehabilitation of libraries, and lobbying reform.

Quinn ascended to the Speakership of the City Council in January 2006, elected by a vote of fifty to zero, with one abstention.

Since term-limit laws were in effect, it was widely anticipated that Quinn, at the end of her eligibility to run for City Council, would enter the 2009 race for mayor since current mayor Michael Bloomberg would also have been unable to seek re-election.

However, despite any mayoral aspirations that she may have had, Quinn supported a successful 2008 bill overturning term limits to allow Bloomberg to seek a third term as mayor in November 2009. The legislation also permits city council members to serve three terms as well, thus Quinn sought reelection to the Council in 2009 and won.

Quinn's future appeared to be in jeopardy when it was revealed that a "slush fund" was funneling millions of dollars per year to phony groups through the Council. Upon discovering the situation, Quinn cooperated with the United States Attorney's Office and the New York City Department of Investigations in pursuit of the matter. Quinn stated that she was not a target of the inquiry. The publicity surrounding the issue did not prevent her from retaining the Speakership of the Council, but it may have been a factor in removing her from consideration for the United States Senate seat left vacant when Hillary Clinton became Secretary of State.

Quinn was an early supporter of Clinton's bid for the presidency and was a member of the LGBT Americans for Hillary Steering Committee.

Quinn continues to work for glbtq rights, championing, among other concerns, health-care benefits for partners of state employees. In 2009, she held meetings with members of the New York Senate to enlist support for a bill to bring marriage equality to the state. She worked tirelessly both behind the scenes and openly in the successful effort led by Governor Cuomo.

Quinn recognizes that the issues that she is tackling are numerous and challenging, but she is optimistic that success will be obtainable through hard work and continued dialogue. In 2007 she told reporter Lisa Iannucci, "I rarely come across an obstacle so large that if you didn't keep working and discussing you weren't able to overcome it. What happens is when people leave the negotiating table and leave the room, they've abandoned the search for commonality, and that's when you don't find a solution. You need to keep talking, keep listening, and don't take no for an answer."

Quinn married attorney Kim Catullo on May 19, 2012. Among the approximately three hundred guests in attendance were many members of the City Council and other legislators. Officiating at the ceremony was Judith S. Kaye, the former Chief Judge of New York's highest court. Kaye wrote a spirited dissent when her court ruled in 2006 against a suit that would have established marriage as a fundamental right for gay and lesbian couples.

In 2013 Quinn launched a bid to become the mayor of New York.

She announced her candidacy in March and took an early lead in the polls. Commentators expected her to emerge victorious from the crowded field of nine candidates in the Democratic primary. She received the endorsement of the *New York Times*, as well as the other two major daily newspapers, as well as a host of gay and lesbian celebrities and political activists, including David Mixner, George Takei, and Edith Windsor.

However, Bloomberg declined to endorse anyone, including Quinn, who had worked closely with him throughout her service on the Council.

Annie Karni of the *New York Daily News* stated that their apparently good relationship "allowed [Quinn] to work hand-in-glove with the mayor and become 'a particularly influential speaker,' . . . [who] worked well with the administration and had a bigger role, and got more done."

Ironically, however, Quinn's ability to collaborate with Bloomberg counted against her. Despite Bloomberg's failure to endorse her, Quinn's opponents portrayed her as his creature, who had made it possible for him to hang on to power and who would continue in the same mold rather than bringing positive change to the city. They specifically cited her stance in favor of revising rather than eliminating stop-and-frisk laws, as well as her statement that she did not intend to replace Police Commissioner Ray Kelly.

Quinn's campaign also blundered by not reaching out more aggressively and explicitly to women and glbtq voters--both natural constituencies for her.

In the late stages of the campaign Quinn brought on board Anita Dunn, who had been a debate coach for President Obama, but, stated Holly Bailly of *Yahoo! News*, "it was a decision that backfired as Quinn came across as awkward and unprepared on stage--a 360-degree turn from a candidate known for being loose and at ease on the trail."

Although Quinn was out as a lesbian--and one who, thanks for New York's legalization of marriage equality, had been able to marry her life-partner--she avoided referring to her own situation. Only in the last weekend of the campaign did she specifically seek the glbtq vote, holding a rally at the site of the

Stonewall Inn.

It was, however, too little and too late. The eventual winner of the Democratic primary, William de Blasio, had made active attempts to garner the glbtq vote and repeatedly cited his endorsement by out actress Cynthia Nixon.

Quinn finished in third place, well out of the running.

Term-limited herself, Quinn will leave the New York City Council in January 2014. She has not announced specific plans for her future in politics.

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