

McAuliffe can't speak at Catholic alma mater

SYRACUSE, N.Y. - The Syracuse Diocese made headlines when it denied former Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe an opportunity to speak at his alma mater, Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School.

Mr. McAuliffe was initially scheduled to speak to about 100 fellow alumni at Ludden Feb. 24, and hold a signing for his new book, "What a Party! My Life Among Democrats, Presidents, Candidates, Donors, Activists, Alligators, and Other Wild Animals."

His appearance at the school was originally approved in January, but several days before the event the diocese withdrew permission for him to speak there.

Father Cliff Auth, diocesan chancellor, said the reversal was a direct result of comments Mr. McAuliffe made in a Jan. 29 interview with radio talk-show host Hugh Hewitt.

During the interview Hewitt asked Mr. McAuliffe about Catholic background and his views on abortion and Mr. McAuliffe said, "I am pro-choice, no question about it."

A little later Hewitt said, "No, but I mean, the whole abortion controversy, that's just ... you compartmentalize that and put that aside?"

Mr. McAuliffe answered, "I can, as can many Catholics."

"The public statement by Mr. McAuliffe in an interview with Mr. Hugh Hewitt in which he stated that he was 'pro-choice - no question about it' was in clear violation of the diocesan policy articulated on Nov. 20, 2003," Father Auth said.

The policy says: "Any person who publicly supports abortion, or who holds that abortion is right or a matter of choice, may not be invited to speak at diocesan functions or in diocesan/parish facilities - except at an academic symposium where both sides of the issue can be fairly presented. Neither may such individuals be

appointed special ministers of the Eucharist, serve as lectors in church, nor be otherwise honored by the church.”

Father Auth said he and Danielle Cummings, assistant chancellor and director of communications, had vetted the book and executed a cursory investigation of Mr. McAuliffe’s background before the original approval of his appearance at the school.

After he was denied an audience at Ludden, Mr. McAuliffe and some of his friends selected nearby Morgan’s restaurant as an alternate site. After the book signing there, a second signing was held at the Barnes & Noble bookstore in DeWitt.

A Syracuse native, Mr. McAuliffe graduated from St. Ann Elementary School before attending Ludden. He received his bachelor’s degree from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and his law degree from Georgetown University, also in Washington.

He is currently presidential campaign strategist for New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Mr. McAuliffe said he was surprised at the diocese’s decision to bar him from speaking.

“I don’t understand the inconsistency,” he said. “I speak at Catholic institutions all over the country.”

He described himself as a “strong Catholic.”

“I go to Mass with my family every Sunday,” he said. “I receive Communion every Sunday.”

“I love Bishop Ludden,” he said. “If I were coming to talk about pro-choice issues that would be one thing, but I was just coming to sign some books for some friends.”

Mr. McAuliffe has served as finance director of the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic National Finance Committee, the national finance chairman of the Gephardt for President Committee, national finance chairman and then national co-chairman of the Clinton-Gore re-election committee. In 2000 he chaired the

Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles.