



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

October 9, 2024

Contact: Alyssa Collins, Board Vice President, frolic.alyssa@gmail.com

The Philomath Frolic & Rodeo Board of Directors received an email following this year's celebration which raised concerns over the flag team's use of the thin blue line US flag in the parade. The thin blue line US flag was highlighted during Thursday and Friday night's rodeo performances as this year's rodeo queen, Katie Kilcullen was introduced. Her father is J. Christopher Kilcullen, a twelve-year officer with Eugene Police Department that was killed in the line of duty in 2011. The thin blue line US flag has been displayed in support for law enforcement and fallen officers since 2014, following the murders of NYPD officers Rafael Ramos and Wnjian Liu. The thin blue line US flag has also been associated with white nationalists, who have flown the flag at their rallies starting in 2017.

The email to the Frolic Board expressed concern that individuals watching the parade might not have been familiar with the use of the flag as a symbol of support for law enforcement, but instead, they might have been offended by its use to signal support of white nationalists. While we acknowledge this concern, the Board of Directors believes the use of the thin blue line US flag in this year's Frolic & Rodeo parade was appropriate. Context matters, and any effort to take this year's use of the flag out of context is nothing more than a deliberate attempt to create controversy where there is none. There was no white nationalist float in the parade; no hate-mongering rally taking place; no negative or controversy that could have been associated with this flag during Frolic weekend. However, there was an 18-member flag team, mounted on horses and dressed in matching turquoise western shirts and white cowboy hats, carrying the American Flag, thin blue line US flag, State of Oregon flag, Frolic & Rodeo flag, and roughly 10 additional flags of various rodeo sponsors. The unmistakable use of the thin blue line US flag in this context was to show support for law enforcement; specifically the rodeo queen's fallen father, the rodeo queen herself, her family, friends, and all the community members affiliated with law enforcement that have supported her and her family since the death of her father.

Prior to the Frolic & Rodeo Board receiving the email discussed above, we understand a similar email was sent to some members of the city's Inclusivity Committee. The Board has reviewed the recorded meeting where that email was presented, the discussion that followed, and the resulting consensus by the Committee not to take any action (other than direct the writer to contact the Frolic & Rodeo directly). Chris Workman is the City Manager of Philomath; he has also volunteered on the Frolic & Rodeo Board of Directors for the past nine years and currently chairs the Entertainment Committee. During the meeting, Mr. Workman clearly stated he was speaking as a committee chair, not as the city manager or on behalf of the Frolic Board of Directors. Following a review of his comments, the Frolic & Rodeo Board of Directors stands in support of the comments Mr. Workman made concerning freedom of expression.

We stand by our mission, which is "to be a family-oriented entertainment organization focused on the traditions on which the community was founded, namely our Western heritage and the logging industry. We plan, carry out and support events which reflect the contemporary interests of our community while promoting volunteerism, public involvement, and a love for learning throughout the region. We are committed to the principle that every individual brings value to

our organization. We recognize the value of diverse backgrounds and identities and celebrate the common interests we all work to achieve.”

The Frolic & Rodeo does not exist to make political statements or take stances on social issues. Similarly, we will not take part in the current “cancel culture” or efforts to silence those we may disagree with. As Mr. Workman insisted, freedom of expression is a fundamental right all Americans should enjoy. This means the Frolic & Rodeo will continue to allow different viewpoints to be expressed in the parade, even if they happen to contradict the values of the Frolic & Rodeo, so long as they do not violate the standard of “free speech” and “family-oriented.” Regardless of intent or impact, the Frolic & Rodeo will not sensor individuals’ or groups’ desire to express themselves in a legal, positive manner.

We are proud of our 72-year history of putting on a great annual event and plan to continue to be a welcoming, positive influence on the community.

Frolic & Rodeo Flag Team, 2024 Frolic Grand Parade

