

Boston Herald (MA)

Volume 36, Issue 7

January 7, 2018

Swearing-in an example of hope, pride in politics

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Edition: 3RD

Section: News

Page: 8

Index Terms:

Columnist-Ray Flynn

Estimated printed pages: 2

Article Text:

As I sat in the Cutler Majestic Theatre, watching former Vice President Joe Biden preside over the swearing-in of Mayor Martin J. Walsh for his second term, with a focus on helping the city's middle class, and Andrea Campbell named the City Council's first African-American female president — I was struck by the unique moment in Boston politics.

I was suddenly back in the time of Mayor James Michael Curley, when enthusiastic crowds would gather on street corners to listen to Boston's "Mayor of the Poor." My mother-in-law, Winnie Coyne, an Irish immigrant, once said, "You could stand in the snow with your shoes off for hours to listen to Mayor Curley."

I found myself looking over the crowd, where young boys and girls listened intently as Biden talked about the importance of helping the city's poorer residents. The message continued when Walsh got to the podium, movingly telling the crowd how he wanted to rebuild the bridge to Long Island so the homeless shelters and rehab programs there would once again provide critical services to the needy.

In addition to the obvious impact the speaking program had on the kids in the audience, I was also thrilled to finally see balanced representation on the City Council. The panel is now comprised of women, minorities and even a veteran — the first one in a long time.

I have attended many historic events over these many years, including State of the Nation addresses and Papal Conclaves. But what unfolded at the Majestic New Year's Day really impressed me and made me proud to be an American.

I listened with admiration as Walsh talked about how his wonderful Irish immigrant, working-class parents helped make him the man he is today. Campbell was equally striking as she recalled her humble roots growing up in Boston and the path that led her to the City Council presidency.

The kind words of respect the speakers had for Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, who was also in attendance, were also inspiring.

It was a far different message than the one we've been getting out of Washington and local news outlets captured the significance of the ceremony perfectly.

As I looked into the faces of all the young people in the crowd and saw how proud they were to be there, I thought to myself, this is what our government and country is supposed to be all about: pride and hope.

Raymond L. Flynn is a former mayor of Boston and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican.

Caption:

NOTHING BUT RESPECT: State Supreme Judicial Court Associate Justice Kimberly S. Budd administers the oath of office for Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh Monday as former Vice President Joe Biden and Walsh's mother, Mary, look on at the Cutler Majestic Theatre.

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JOE BIDEN and MARTIN J. WALSH

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Record Number: 37069558