

## Dallas gays preparing to watch as history's made

By Praveen Sathianathan Staff Writer  
Jan 15, 2009 - 7:47:03 PM

Despite role of anti-gay minister in inauguration, activists say they have high hopes for progress during Obama's administration

Dallas gay rights activists said this week that despite President-elect Barack Obama's decision to invite a conservative evangelical minister to deliver the invocation at his inauguration, they remain hopeful that the new administration will keep its promises on LGBT issues. And most said they still intend to watch the inauguration ceremony and celebrations.

"The LGBT community overwhelmingly voted for President-elect Obama, and as we look ahead, we are optimistic about the future," said Erin Moore, president of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Moore said her organization, the Resource Center of Dallas and LULAC Council 4871-The Dallas Rainbow Council will be hosting an inauguration watch party at the Resource Center.

The inclusion of the Rev. Rick Warren, one of the country's most well-known evangelical pastors, in what has been described as the most open and accessible presidential inauguration ever has caused much debate and was highly criticized by gay rights activists across the country.

Warren, pastor of Saddleback church in California, was one of the strongest supporters of Proposition 8, which amended that state's Constitution to ban same-sex marriage. Warren urged his congregation to support Prop 8 by comparing gay marriage to pedophilia and incest.

Having him invited to be such an integral part of the inauguration ceremony has not set well with many LGBT people.

Moore said, "Some of our members are angry and others believe he [Obama] is using a big-tent-style philosophy."

But, she added, "he [Warren] is saying a prayer. He is not setting policy. Our last Democratic president set forth some of the most damaging legislation to our community, and he is still revered."

The debate over the inclusion of Warren caused gay rights groups in some cities to pull out of planned activities.

In San Antonio, the local Stonewall Democrats chapter, Equality Texas and Human Rights Campaign San Antonio's steering committee had planned to host an inaugural ball at a restaurant in the Marriott Riverwalk Hotel on inauguration day.

However, citing Warren's inclusion, the Stonewall Democrats chapter and Equality Texas decided to withdraw from the activities, leaving HRC/San Antonio to host the event alone.

Rafael McDonnell, strategic communications and program manager for the Resource Center of

Dallas, said Tuesday's event there "is on a much smaller scale. It is really much more low-key than the event planned in San Antonio."

And, he said, new developments in the inaugural plans "give us hope for the future.

"In recent days, since the Rev. Warren announcement, there have been some positive signs, including the lesbian couple invited on a inaugural Whistle Stop Tour and the inclusion of [openly gay Episcopal bishop] the Rev. Gene Robinson in inaugural activities," McDonnell said. "Is that enough? Let's wait until Jan. 21 and see if the dream becomes a reality. The community as a whole is ready to make sure we are not ignored."

According to members of the inaugural committee, the decision to include Robinson in pre-inauguration activities set for Jan. 18 at the Lincoln Memorial was not made in response to criticism from gay rights groups.

Clark Stevens, a spokesman for the inaugural committee, said Robinson was invited because he advised Obama during the election on religious and LGBT issues.

**Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, praised the president-elect for his "stellar choice" in asking Robinson to offer the prayer at the Lincoln Memorial to kick off the inaugural festivities.**

**"Bishop Robinson is an inspiration to millions worldwide, because he lives out the ideals of courage, humility and truth-speaking. This is certainly a good sign that our nation is indeed moving forward," Carey said.**

In an exclusive interview on the Rachel Maddow show Wednesday, Jan. 14 on MSNBC, Bishop Robinson said, "I long for a government who respects every human being. I believe in equal rights for all citizens and as a religious person, I will support anything that supports this."

For Moore, Robinson's inclusion is "a sign of Obama's openness to include everyone. I don't think he's scared of including certain minority groups.

"Rick Warren has been very offensive to our community. However, we are inaugurating a new Democratic president that we all worked really hard to put there," she continued. "We have to give him a chance. Besides, I think it's a chance to open dialogue between all groups."

Cece Cox, associate executive director for GLBT community services for Resource Center of Dallas, said she hopes as many people as possible will attend the event Tuesday at the Resource Center.

"This inauguration is an important event for the LGBT community, and we want as many members of the community and allies as possible to have an opportunity to share this event," Cox said.

"With a new administration at hand, the hard work of legislative change is ahead of us. We should take a moment to come together, mark this occasion, and gear up for the future."

Jesse Garcia, president of LULAC Council 4871 agreed. "This inauguration is one of those events we will remember where we were when it happened, which is why we should share this with our community," he said.