



## 'Error' caused gay bishop's TV blackout

Robinson's inaugural prayer came before broadcast began

Friday, January 16, 2009

Gay Episcopal Bishop Eugene Robinson's opening prayer at President-elect Barack Obama's inaugural celebration Sunday at the Lincoln Memorial was not televised due to an unspecified "error," according to a spokesperson for the inaugural committee.

"We had always intended and planned for Rt. Rev. Robinson's invocation to be included in the televised portion of the program," Josh Earnest, director of communications for the Presidential Inaugural Committee, said in a statement.

"We regret the error in executing this plan — but are gratified that hundreds of thousands of people who gathered on the mall heard his eloquent prayer for our nation that was a fitting start to our event."

Earnest's statement did not provide any details on the cause of the error or who was responsible for the misstep.

Separately, a spokesperson for HBO, the exclusive broadcaster of the event, said the cable network had "no involvement" in scheduling Robinson's appearance on stage.

"HBO has no involvement in the scheduling of those who appeared as part of the televised event," said Jeff Cusson, HBO's vice president for corporate affairs. "We had a set broadcast time and went forth accordingly."

**Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said it was nonetheless "profoundly disappointing and disturbing" that Robinson was not part of the broadcast.**

**"Bishop Gene Robinson is an inspiration to millions worldwide because he lives out the ideals of courage, humility and truth speaking," she said in a statement. "It is profoundly disappointing and disturbing that HBO viewers did not have the opportunity to watch Robinson, a genuine hero to so many in our community and others around the globe, give his powerful prayer at Sunday's We Are One inaugural event. Our nation becomes better and stronger when given the chance to hear from the diversity of its people. This did not happen yesterday with Bishop Robinson, and absolutely should have."**

People who attended the event saw Robinson deliver a prayer that, among other things, acknowledged the civil rights struggle of gays and transgender people.

Upon learning that Robinson's appearance came before HBO started its coverage of the event, gay activists asked the inaugural committee for an explanation.

Robinson walked on stage at the foot of the steps of the Lincoln Memorial about 2:20 p.m. Sunday, some ten minutes before the 2:30 p.m. start of the event, as previously announced by HBO and the Obama Inaugural Committee.

Last night, a spokesperson for HBO told gay blog AfterElton.com that the broadcast of the event was scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m. by prior agreement with the Inaugural Committee.

“The producer of the concert has said that the Presidential Inaugural Committee made the decision to keep the invocation [by Robinson] as part of the pre-show,” HBO said in a statement.

More than 400,000 people were estimated to have attended the Lincoln Memorial celebration, which included performances by prominent singers and entertainers. Obama also spoke at the event.

The omission of Robinson’s invocation prayer from the broadcast could be viewed by some gay activists as another slight by Obama and his inaugural planners. Activists raised strong objections last month when the Inaugural Committee announced that megachurch pastor and gay rights opponent Rick Warren would deliver the opening prayer at the inaugural swearing-in ceremony at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 20.

Warren emerged last year as a strong supporter of California’s Proposition 8, which repealed the state’s same-sex marriage law. In statements on behalf of the ballot proposition, Warren compared gay marriage to incest, drawing expressions of outrage from gay activists.

Obama, a long-time supporter of gay rights, said he strongly disagreed with Warren’s position on the issue and that he chose Warren for the inauguration’s opening prayer as a gesture of unity and to build bridges between his Democratic administration and the socially conservative Christian community.

Some activists viewed his decision to invite Robinson, an openly gay Episcopal bishop, to deliver the opening prayer at the Lincoln Memorial celebration as an attempt to offset the criticism by gays and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party to Warren’s role at the inauguration itself.

“Many in the gay community saw Robinson’s selection to deliver Sunday’s prayer as an olive branch,” said gay blogger Michael Jensen.

“Wherever the fault lies, this is yet another unfortunate turn involving GLBT concerns over Obama’s selection of Rick Warren to deliver the prayer at Obama’s inauguration,” Jensen said.