

Gay Episcopalian wins key vote for bishop

By Rachel Zoll
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A New Hampshire clergyman moved a step closer Sunday to becoming the first openly gay elected bishop in the Episcopal Church, winning one of two final votes required to be confirmed.

The House of Deputies, a legislative body composed of clergy and lay people from dioceses across the country, voted to approve the Rev. V. Gene Robinson as the bishop of New Hampshire. He faces a final vote Monday in the House of Bishops.

Robinson, 56, said he felt "very peaceful on the inside" and "very humbled" by the results. He appealed to opponents not to leave the church but said he would not be responsible if they did.

"I'm carrying a lot on my shoulders," he said. "I'm not going to carry that."

The American Anglican Council, which represents conservative bishops and parishes, said it was "deeply grieved" by the results.

The council and like-minded bishops overseas in the Anglican Communion have said that they would consider breaking ties with the denomination if Robinson is confirmed. Episcopalianism forms the U.S. branch of the 77 million-member global association of churches.

"It is a tragic decision that leads the Episcopal Church to the brink of shattering the Anglican Communion," the council said.

The House of Deputies used a complex procedure that required clergy and lay people in diocesan delegations to cast separate ballots. Robinson needed a majority of votes in each delegation to win. In the combined results, 128 delegations voted yes and 63



JIM MONE/Associated Press

The Rev. V. Gene Robinson applauds as the Diocese of Puerto Rico is recognized by the Episcopal General Convention on Sunday in Minneapolis prior to the vote by the House of Deputies to elect Robinson, who is homosexual, as the bishop of New Hampshire. He now faces a vote of the House of Bishops.

voted no. The votes of 25 delegations were not counted because their members were divided.

Robinson, a divorced father of two, has lived with his partner, Mark Andrew, for 13 years. If he is confirmed at this week's Episcopal General Con-

vention, it will have an impact far beyond his diocese.

Bishops who believe that gay sex is a sin contend that allowing Robinson to serve is a tacit endorsement of ordaining homosexuals.

If conservatives leave the church, it

will spark a bitter fight over parish property and funds and undercut the denomination's influence.

Liberals said the threat had been exaggerated and noted that many conservatives had pledged to break ties before over issues such as ordaining

women but did not follow through.

Robinson was elected by his diocese in June, but the church requires that a majority of convention delegates ratify his election. It is rare for the General Convention to reject a diocese's choice of bishop.

The vote by the House of Deputies came after about an hour of emotional but polite debate.

Bonnie Anderson, a parishioner from the Diocese of Michigan, said deputies should not be swayed by warnings about a potential split in the church.

"You may be afraid — afraid of schism and afraid it will hurt your church budget. Don't be afraid," she said. "The power behind you and within you is far greater than the resistance before you."

George Marshall, a parishioner from the Diocese of Albany, N.Y., said confirming Robinson would send a damaging message that Episcopalianism is guided by shifting cultural attitudes, not by Scripture.

"It will prove once again that our church doesn't have the confidence to proclaim the Gospel," Marshall said. "Do not do this thing."

Robinson has been the assistant to the New Hampshire bishop, who is retiring. He has repeatedly rejected calls from opponents to withdraw his candidacy to prevent a breakup of the church, as a gay clergyman in England did recently.

A final vote for Robinson could build momentum for approving a blessing ceremony for same-sex couples, Episcopalianism on both sides of the issue say.

A decision on the proposed ceremony is expected later in the meeting, which runs through Friday.

Episcopal Church:
www.episcopalchurch.org

Official arrested as DUI suspect

► Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher posts bond in OC.

By Matt Elliott
World Staff Writer

State Insurance Commissioner Carroll Fisher was arrested early Sunday for allegedly driving under the influence.

Fisher, 63, was arrested just after 12:30 a.m. when a caller, who was following a swerving Ford Crown Victoria, reported a suspected drunken driver southbound on Lake Hefner Parkway in Oklahoma City, said Lt. Damon Alexander, a police spokesman.

Police arrested Fisher after he allegedly made a right turn from the left-hand southbound lane of the parkway onto Britton Road. Officers reported they smelled



Carroll Fisher

alcohol on Fisher's breath and found an open can of beer in the car, Alexander said.

"This citizen contacted 911 dispatch and officers responded to

the scene," said Alexander.

Alexander said the caller phoned police after seeing the car run off the road and swerve back in the southbound lane. When two patrol cars arrived on scene, they saw the car make the alleged illegal turn and the officers stopped the vehicle.

Fisher measured .08 in a breath alcohol test, Alexander said. Drivers who register at or above .08 are considered under the influence.

The commissioner was booked into jail shortly after his arrest for complaints including driving under the influence, a misdemeanor, and transporting an open container. He was later released after posting a \$760 bond.

Fisher graduated with a business degree in insurance from Oklahoma State University in 1963, according to the Oklahoma Democratic Party's Web site, and has been in the insurance

business for about 40 years.

Before his election in 1998, he owned Carroll Fisher Insurance in Tulsa, the site stated.

He is chairman of the state Real Estate Appraiser Board and also directs the Oklahoma Motor Vehicle Assigned Risk Plan.

Fisher also is chairman of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners committees on Workers Compensation and Information Technology.

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