

IN BRIEF

Miers' beliefs don't dispel evangelical doubts

If Harriet Miers is confirmed, evangelicals can finally claim one of their own on the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet the spiritual journey that led her to be born again and spend 25 years affiliated with a conservative church has not eased concerns among Christians about her views on abortion, gay rights and other key social issues.

"Our lack of knowledge about Harriet Miers, and the absence of a record on the bench, give us insufficient information," said Tony Perkins, of the conservative Family Research Council.

Yet members of her longtime congregation, Valley View Christian Church in Dallas, say her strong character and faith are clear from her dedication to their community.

Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan Hecht, Miers' friend for 30 years, said he brought her to the church when she wanted "a deeper commitment to faith."

After a childhood attending both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, she underwent a full-immersion baptism at Valley View in 1979, and later taught Sunday school classes.

But church involvement alone may not be enough to assuage Christian conservatives.

John Green, an expert on religion and politics at the University of Akron, said Miers is failing to gain unequivocal support from some evangelicals partly because they feel burned by past nominees such as Justice David Souter.

Green said evangelicals are acutely aware of the diverse beliefs within their own movement.

Valley View is part of a movement known as Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. These conservative congregations grew from a 19th century reform movement that aimed to break down denominational barriers among Christians.

The churches tend to be more focused on evangelizing than social issues, although Valley View ministers have preached about the sanctity of marriage and against abortion from the pulpit, and the congregation has provided voter registration information to members.

Valley View's mission statement says the church believes the Bible is the infallible word of God and salvation can be found only through Jesus. But it also states "we try not to be dogmatic about matters on which believers hold divergent views."

Doug Foster, an Abilene Christian University historian who specializes in the independent Christian church movement, said it would be "highly unlikely" for a member of a congregation like Valley View to support abortion rights.

— The Associated Press

Hurricane tab less than \$150 billion

BY ANDREW TAYLOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The federal government's tab for hurricane relief and rebuilding efforts is likely to come to less than \$150 billion, Congress' top budget analyst said Thursday, an amount significantly less than original estimates tossed about in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Congressional Budget Office Director Douglas Holtz-Eakin told the

House Budget Committee that his agency now estimates damage to homes, government buildings, oil refineries and businesses will total between \$70 billion and \$130 billion. Of that, at least \$40 billion is covered by private insurance, he said.

Those figures don't include the immediate relief and rescue efforts, which have been paid for out of the \$62 billion Congress has already approved. About \$20 billion of those

funds have been earmarked so far, Federal Emergency Management Agency chief R. David Paulison told lawmakers.

But Holtz-Eakin said the total costs to taxpayers will come nowhere close to estimates of \$300 billion to \$400 billion made by some a month ago.

"There's nothing that we've seen so far that adds up to even approach \$200 billion," he told The Associated Press later in an interview. "Every-

thing we've seen is in the vicinity of \$150 billion or below."

CBO also updated its estimate of the budget deficit for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, estimating \$317 billion in red ink, significantly less than 2004's record \$412 billion — and \$14 billion less than CBO estimated just seven weeks ago.

The improvement in the deficit

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