

NATIONAL news

QUEERS CAUTIOUS ABOUT MIERS

Lawyer called alternately moderate and White House crony

by Sarah Dougher

Organizations working for equal rights for queer Americans were cautious about the nomination of lawyer Harriet Miers to fill the shoes of departing U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

The *Washington Post* reports that Miers went on record favoring equal civil rights for gays when she ran for Dallas City Council and that she said the city had a responsibility to pay for AIDS education and patient services.

Speaking to Miers' completion of a 1989 survey on gay and lesbian rights, Human Rights Campaign president Joe Solmonese said: "This is only a small window into Harriet Miers' thinking 15 years ago, but it raises the possibility that she is more fair-minded than our opponents are hoping. We will be closely watching how the White House responds to this news, and it will be a good test of whether the extreme right wing has hijacked the process on nominating a Supreme Court justice."

"She wrote she supports 'civil rights' for gay Americans but that she would not support repealing a law that criminalized consensual sex between same-sex couples. That is a contradiction that the Senate should investigate. Still, in 1989 she supported AIDS funding and recognized the importance of AIDS to the whole community," added Solmonese. "There are more questions than answers when it comes to her stance on civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans. But what we

do know is that right-wing extremists are unhappy with the mere possibility that Miers is fair."

Many particularly left-leaning politicians and organizations were frustrated by the lack of forthcoming details from President Bush's most recent court appointment, Chief Justice John Roberts. Eleanor D. Acheson, director of public policy and government affairs for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, notes: "This time, the White House and nominee must be more forthcoming. The stakes are simply too high. Indeed, the person who succeeds O'Connor will likely provide the swing vote on critical cases that will affect the rights of Americans for generations to come."

"The administration and Harriet Miers each have a duty to tell the American people about her role in and views on the numerous legal matters she has had any responsibility with related to her several positions in the executive office of the president, in addition to the nominee's obligation to make public her views on the constitutional and other legal issues raised to now Chief Justice Roberts."

Log Cabin Republicans president Patrick Guerriero also implied that it might be too early



An avowed evangelical Christian, Harriet Miers confounds critics and allies alike.

to tell about Miers' record and position on civil rights as they affect queer Americans. In a statement released Oct. 3, he said: "Log Cabin looks forward to a thorough and thoughtful review of Harriet Miers' nomination to the United States Supreme Court. Recognizing the importance and impact of the Supreme Court, we support the confirmation of all fair-minded jurists to the bench. Given the lack of a

public record on Ms. Miers, the confirmation hearings will be a critically important part of the confirmation process. Log Cabin will carefully study Ms. Miers' testimony during this confirmation process, particularly as it relates to questions of basic fairness for gay and lesbian Americans."

Given the fact that anti-choice and anti-gay organizations are also showing reticence in putting their full weight behind the nominee, political spectators should get ready for a lively debate in the Senate hearings.

Miers is the White House counsel to Bush. She was deputy chief of staff for policy prior to her appointment as White House counsel to replace Alberto Gonzales when he became attorney general. Prior to her service in the Bush

administration, Miers was a lawyer in private practice for 27 years, mostly handling business cases, and served as the first female president of both the Dallas Bar Association and later the State Bar of Texas. She also served one term on the Dallas City Council.

Miers is single and has no children. Texas Supreme Court Justice Nathan Hecht has been described as her "companion" and "on-again, off-again boyfriend"; he has known her for more than 25 years.

Valley View Christian Church in Dallas was Miers' church from 1980 until she moved to Washington, D.C., to work for Bush. The church is evangelical. While being independent, Valley View is associated with the Restoration Movement Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.

Ron Key, a former senior pastor at Valley View, has been Miers' pastor since the early 1980s. Because Valley View cut back on missionary work, parishioners were split last summer, and Key found a new church with Miers and others. When asked about Miers' views, Key said: "Her personal views are consistent with that of evangelical Christians.... You can tell a lot about her from her decade of service in a conservative church." If Miers holds the same or similar beliefs of her former church, then she is likely to be an evangelical Christian.

Miers is a former board member of Exodus Ministry, a Dallas-based nondenominational Christian organization established to help offenders and their families "become productive members of society by meeting both their spiritual and physical needs." It should not be confused with the "ex-gay" ministry Exodus International. **JW**

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