

Top Democrat to Vote Against Bush Pick

Civil rights record main concern

(AP)—Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid announced his opposition to Chief Justice-nominee John Roberts on Tuesday, voicing doubts about Roberts' commitment to civil rights and accusing the Bush administration of stonewalling requests for documents that might shed light on his views.

"I have reluctantly concluded that this nominee has not satisfied the high burden that would justify my voting for his confirmation based on the current record," the Nevada Democrat said on the Sen-

ate floor.

At the same time, two other Democrats, Sen. Max Baucus of Montana and Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska edged toward expressions of support for Roberts.

Taken together, the developments indicate Roberts remains on course for confirmation next week to succeed the late William H. Rehnquist and become the nation's 17th chief justice - but may draw significant Democratic opposition.

Reid's decision pleased women's groups and civil rights organizations that had feared he would support Roberts.

"This is a very close question for me. But I must resolve my doubts in favor of the American people whose rights would be in jeopardy if John Roberts turned out to be the wrong



person for the job," he said.

Referring to publicly released memos that date to Robert's tenure as a Reagan administration lawyer,

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—Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid

Reid said they showed the young attorney "played a significant role in shaping and advancing the Republican agenda to roll back civil rights protections."

"No one suggests that John Roberts was motivated by bigotry or animosity toward minorities or women," Reid added. "But these memos lead one to question whether

he truly appreciated the history of the civil rights struggle. He wrote about discrimination as an abstract concept, not as a flesh and blood reality for countless of his fellow citizens."

Reid also said Roberts followed a "disingenuous strategy" at last week's confirmation hearings of suggesting that the views in the

memos were not his own.

Democrats have tried without success to persuade the administration to release documents from Roberts' tenure as principal deputy solicitor general, a senior Justice Department job he held in the administration of the first President Bush. White House claims to shield the documents are "utterly unpersuasive," Reid said, adding that Attorney General Alberto Gonzales had refused to meet with Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., to discuss the papers.

"The failure of the White House to produce relevant documents is reason enough for any senator to oppose this nomination. The administration cannot treat the Senate with such disrespect without some consequences," Reid said.

New Hurricane Rita Grows

Gulf Coast may get hit again

(AP) - Rita strengthened rapidly to a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday as it raked the Florida Keys with flooding rain and sparked a flurry of storm preparations across the Gulf Coast.

Thousands of people were evacuated from the Keys and low-lying areas of northern Cuba. On the far side of the Gulf of Mexico in Texas, Galveston started evacuations and officials made plans to move refugees from Hurricane Katrina who had been housed in the Houston area to Arkansas.

After the sluggish government response to Hurricane Katrina along the northern Gulf Coast, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush said more than 2,000 Florida National Guard troops and dozens of law enforcement officers were ready to deal with the storm's aftermath. More than 200 truckloads of ice and water were prepared for delivery to the Keys if needed and helicopters were in place for search and rescue, he said.



Hurricane Katrina evacuees Jonathan Hunt, 5, left, Joshua Hunt, 7, center and Tierra, 11, are evacuated again Tuesday from a shelter at Reliant Arena in Houston because of a new hurricane approaching the Gulf Coast. (AP Photo)

New Orleans Survivor's Odyssey Ends

73-year-old released from prison

(AP) - A 73-year-old diabetic grandmother and church elder who fled Katrina's floodwaters for the safety of a hotel ended up in prison instead for more than two weeks - all over a bite of food. She was released last Friday.

Police in Kenner, La., a New Orleans suburb, arrested Merlene Maten the day after the hurricane on charges she took \$63.50 in goods from a looted deli. Though never before in trouble with the law, her bail was set at a stiff \$50,000 and she was shipped away to a state penitentiary.

Family and eyewitnesses insist Maten's prison odyssey was unwarranted, claiming she only had gone to her car to get some sausage to eat when officers cuffed her in frustration, unable to catch younger looters at a nearby store.

Despite intervention from the nation's largest senior lobby, volunteer lawyers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and even a private attorney, the family fought a battle for 16 days to get her freed.

Then, hours after her plight was featured in an Associated Press story, a local judge on Thursday ordered Maten freed on her own recognition, setting up a sweet re-



Merlene Maten, 73, is shown in this undated photo provided by the Maten family.

union with her daughter, grandchildren and 80-year-old husband.

Maten must still face the looting charge at a court hearing in October. But the family, armed with several witnesses, intends to prove she was wrongly arrested outside the hotel.

"There were people looting, but she wasn't one of them. Instead of chasing after people who were running, they (police) grabbed the old lady who was walking," said Short, who works in traffic enforcement for neighboring New Orleans police.

Christine Bishop, the owner of the Check In Check Out deli that Maten was accused of looting, said that she was angry that her store was damaged, but that she would not want anyone charged with a crime if the person had simply tried to get food to survive.

"Especially not a 70-year-old woman," Bishop said.

Minimum Wage Increase Workers receive 25 cents more per hour next year

Oregon's minimum wage workers will get a 25-cent raise starting next year, increasing hourly incomes from \$7.25 to \$7.50. Currently, Oregon's minimum wage is second highest in the nation, beneath Washington State at \$7.35 per hour. The federal minimum wage, in contrast, has been stuck at \$5.15 since 1997.

"Past reports have found the 'real' cost of living in Oregon is rising twice as fast as overall inflation—for example more than 27 percent between 1999 and 2003 - while medium household income rose only 2.5 percent in the same period," said Dan Gardner, Commissioner of the

Bureau of Labor and Industries. "Unfortunately, that shows that many Oregonians are losing ground particularly due to the rising cost of energy. While raising the minimum wage will at least ensure that the lowest-paid Oregonians make up some ground against the rising costs of such items as gasoline, utilities and insurance, it has unfortunately not elevated them out of poverty."

Employers will receive a poster reflecting the new rate in December to post it up for January 1, 2006. Posters will also be available for download at www.boli.state.or.us.

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