

Miers's beliefs, identity were in dispute before nomination was dropped: Episcopal ties overlooked

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As U.S. senators and other political leaders pressured the White House for more written evidence of U.S. Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers's ideas and beliefs, the Texan attorney who recently served as President Bush's private counsel withdrew her nomination last month.

Almost immediately, religious conservatives appeared eager to unite behind a nominee likely to rule in their favor on hot-button issues like abortion, gay rights and church-state separation. "We stand ready to support a nominee who truly is in the mold of [Justices] Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas," said Wendy Wright, executive vice president of Concerned Women for America.

Even James Dobson, one of Miers's most prominent religious supporters, said he was disappointed by recent revelations that she gave speeches a decade ago in which she said "self-determination" should guide decisions about abortion.

Leaders of the Interfaith Alliance and Americans United for Separation of Church and State attributed Miers's withdrawal to renewed criticism from religious right groups following release of a report by the *Washington Post* on a 1993 speech by Miers on "self-determination."

"The ongoing debate continues surrounding the attempt to once again criminalize abortions or to once and for all guarantee the freedom of the individual women's [sic] right to decide for herself whether she will have an abortion," she said, according to the *Post*.

Miers added that those seeking to resolve such disputes would do well to remember that "we gave up" a long time ago on "legislating religion or morality" and that "when science cannot determine the facts and decisions vary based upon religious

belief, then government should not act.”

Bush, who “reluctantly” accepted her withdrawal, blamed senators for insisting on seeing internal records. But opponents among Republican conservatives said they did not know enough about Miers’s views on abortion and her judicial philosophy.

Even claims about her religious identity—she is an ex-Catholic conservative evangelical, according to the White House—were flawed and overlooked her Episcopal Church ties.

Catholic officials in Dallas say they have no record of Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers ever being Catholic, despite reports that she was raised in that church before attending an evangelical Protestant church.

Catholic News Service reported that church officials examined “all known sacramental records,” including baptism certificates, and found no evidence that Miers was ever a Catholic.

“The Diocese of Dallas has no record of Harriet Miers or her immediate family ever having been a member of the Catholic Church,” church spokesman Bronson Havard told CNS.

Much has been made of Miers’s evangelical faith, including her apparent born-again experience in the late 1970s and membership at Valley View Christian Church, as well as her recent move to a new evangelical church with other Valley View members.

When Miers is in Washington, she most frequently attends St. John’s Episcopal Church, which is across the street from the White House and is where Bush often worships, according to White House spokespersons. In Dallas, besides attending her evangelical congregation, she also worships with members of her family at the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, as previously reported.

Critics accused the Bush administration of focusing too heavily on Miers’s faith. Havard said Miers may have occasionally attended Catholic churches but was never considered a Catholic. *—Religion News Service*