

John Ashcroft Will Bring Pentecostal Faith to White House Cabinet Post

The former senator's Republican conservatism is under fire, but a Democratic colleague says his integrity 'can't be questioned'

The newly confirmed U.S. attorney general believes the nation should build a climate for success during the next four years instead of resigning itself to political stalemates.

Former Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., says it took dozens of congressional ballots before Thomas Jefferson took office in 1801. Despite the prolonged deadlock, Jefferson became one of the greatest presidents in history.

"I don't think it pays to forecast failure. I think it pays to create an environment for success," Ashcroft told Charisma on the eve of his nomination by incoming President George W. Bush.

"Too often the liberal media wants to take the more conservative of any candidate who prevails in a race and try to control the outcome of the [person's] efforts by saying, 'It can't work and is destined to fail.' Well, I don't think it is destined to fail. I think we have the opportunity to make of it what we can," he said.

Ashcroft's battle for confirmation to the post was mostly uphill. Bitter criticism from activists opposed to his

conservative, pro-life stands greeted his nomination. And in early January, civil rights groups announced a campaign to derail the appointment.

However, senators approved their former colleague on Feb. 1 by a vote of 58 to 42. New Jersey Democrat Robert Torricelli told The Washington Post: "While I have obvious philosophical differences with John Ashcroft, his ability and integrity simply can't be questioned. The president is entitled to have an attorney general of his own ideology."

Meanwhile, the former senator's pastor questioned the racial discrimination charges leveled against him.

Mark Batterson—pastor of National Community Church, an Assemblies of God (AG) congregation in Washington, that Ashcroft helped organize the five-year-old fellowship. Composed primarily of singles under 35, its ethnic mix includes African Americans and Asians.

"People are trying to take a quote out of context or take one situation because they don't agree with his viewpoints," Batterson said. "I just think he's a person of integrity, and you can't go wrong with a person of integrity in that kind of position."

In a previous Charisma story, Ashcroft, the son and grandson of Pentecostal pastors, talked about how losing past elections had opened new doors.

No loss was as dramatic, or recovery as quick, as Ashcroft's latest setback, however. He was

locked in a tight race for re-election with Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan when the governor died in a plane crash on Oct. 16.

It was too late to remove Carnahan's name from the ballot, and a groundswell of support carried him to a narrow victory. His widow then accepted appointment to his seat until a special election next year.

Despite the irregular loss, Ashcroft quickly conceded. His gracious move became a marked contrast to the presidential battle that wound up in the U.S. Supreme Court. Before his Senate term ended, however, he had considered staying in Washington, D.C.

Reflecting on his decision to abide by Missouri voters' decision, the longtime AG member said the voters' choice reflected compassion and respect for the deceased governor's family. Those are admirable virtues, he commented, while adding that constantly demanding one's rights and exhausting legal remedies will create a culture nobody wants to live in.

"I've had a practice every day in my office—before we start the day we invite the presence of God in what we do and say," Ashcroft said. "For me to try and grab the reins from the people I serve and say, 'Your will will be set aside because I have legal rights,' would have been inappropriate and wrong."

The chief law-enforcement officer sees a spiritual side to the democratic process. He believes the Lord prompts people to make good choices, noting how some people don't think individuals must act because God is in control.

"If we fail to make [choices], He gives us the dignity of

living with the consequences of our own activities or inactivity,” he said. “And if we want to have a better government, we need to ask God to help us make better choices.”

Ashcroft contrasted pundits who already doom Bush’s presidency with naysayers who predict the federal budget can never be balanced—one of the proudest accomplishments of Ashcroft’s Senate term.

“Real leadership always changes the definition of the possible,” he said. “Jesus changed the menu of the way we respond to things. The possible had always been ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’ and He taught us there are other ways to respond. That’s what leadership is all about.”

—Ken Walker