

From Springfield, MO

John Ashcroft, attorney General, Governor, U.S. Senator

Former U.S. Attorney General, Governor of Missouri, and U.S. Senator. John Ashcroft has been leading Americans for over 30 years in public and private service.

John Ashcroft was born May 9, 1942, in Chicago, Illinois, the son of Grace and James Robert Ashcroft. He and his family moved to Springfield soon after, primarily to be closer to the headquarters of the Assemblies of God.

His grandfather and father were both evangelical preachers, and Rev Ashcroft's household had strict rules. Movies, for example, were not allowed, because even in the 1940s and '50s the Ashcrofts did not approve of Hollywood's liberal lifestyles. In high school, Ashcroft worked at the local Dairy Queen, but he says he never attended a dance or had premarital sex, and he does not swear, smoke, or drink alcoholic beverages. He has refused to participate in raffles, even to support conservative causes, because he does not gamble.

His father was a minister in an Assemblies of God congregation, served as president of Evangel University (1958–74), and jointly as President of Central Bible College (1958–63). He later served as president of Valley Forge Christian College. His mother was a homemaker whose parents had emigrated from Norway.

The deeply religious and goal-driven young Ashcroft graduated from Springfield's Hillcrest High School with honors and set off for Yale University. After graduating from the Ivy League, he went on to receive his law degree from the University of Chicago in 1967.

After law school, Ashcroft briefly taught Business Law and worked as an administrator at Southwest Missouri State University.

Governor and Senator

John Ashcroft was elected governor in 1984 and re-elected in 1988, becoming the first (and, to date, the only) Republican in Missouri history elected to two consecutive terms. In 1994 Ashcroft was elected to the U.S. Senate from Missouri, again succeeding John Danforth, who retired from the position.

Attorney General

In December 2000, Ashcroft was chosen for the position of U.S. attorney general by president-elect George W. Bush. He was confirmed by the Senate by a vote of 58 to

42, with most Democratic senators voting against him, citing his prior opposition to using forced busing to achieve desegregation and their opposition to Ashcroft's pro-life view.

John Ashcroft took over the position of attorney general during one of the most difficult periods in our nation's history. Not long after assuming the post, the country was attacked by terrorists on September 11. His primary role became prosecuting the people behind the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He pushed for the passage of the USA Patriot Act, which expanded the government's power to detain non-citizens, conduct surveillance, and investigate persons suspected of involvement in criminal activity. This act became the official law enforcement tool used to arrest these suspects, including more than 1,200 people jailed after the attacks.

As the nation's chief law enforcement officer, Ashcroft played a key role in the Bush administration's aggressive effort to expand executive power in the fight against terrorism. But he also showed a willingness to stand up to the White House at critical times—most famously in a March 2004 visit to his hospital room over the wiretapping program. Ashcroft was recovering from surgery when two top White House aides came to his hospital bedside and tried to persuade him to sign an extension for eavesdropping on Americans without warrants. He refused to certify its legality.

After a turbulent time presiding over the office of attorney general, he announced his resignation on November 9, 2004. His term officially ended on February 3, 2005.

After stepping down from the Justice Department, Ashcroft formed a consulting company specializing in homeland security and other business and legal issues. Despite his high-profile positions in Washington, D.C., John always made time to "get back home" to his farm near Willard. His job put him on the front lines of history, but his life continued to revolve around a small town here in southwest Missouri.

*John Ashcroft sang with a group of politicians known as "The Singing Senators."

*Fortune Magazine named him one of the Top 10 Education Governors in the country.

*Authored Lessons from a Father to His Son.

As Attorney General during one of the most turbulent times in American history, John Ashcroft is a uniquely positioned expert on leadership, and other issues currently facing the nation.

Ashcroft was only 13 years old when former Dairy Queen operator Bud Bergstrom gave him his first job. When Ashcroft was elected governor of Missouri, Mr. Bergstrom presented his former employee with this soft-serve machine as a memento.

SENIOR MOMENTS ARCHIVES