

the Record, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, Jan. 31, 2001]

Confirm John Ashcroft

Alamerica Bank,

Birmingham, AL, January 31, 2001.

To Members of the United States Senate: I am an African-American from Birmingham, Alabama. I live in a state known around the world for its long and ugly history of racial segregation and pervasive discrimination.

I am a former National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (``NAACP'') and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (``SCLC'') trial attorney and a staunch supporter of each organization's mission and goals. After graduating from law school in 1973, I spent the next two decades litigating and winning landmark school desegregation, fair housing and equal employment opportunity cases for the NAACP and SCLC. In 1976, I obtained a full and complete pardon from the State of Alabama for Mr. Clarence Norris, the last known surviving ``Scottsboro Boy''.

I voted for former President Bill Clinton twice and supported him in his fight against impeachment. I also voted for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman last Fall. I am a political independent who assesses a political candidate or appointee's fitness for office based upon the content of his character--NOT his party affiliation.

I believe it is time for the United States Senate to confirm John Ashcroft as Attorney General. Here is why:

1. As a former Governor and U.S. Senator, John Ashcroft may have played political hardball, but he is not a racist.

When John Ashcroft was first nominated to be Attorney General, I read the newspaper stories about his successful effort to defeat the federal judgeship nomination of Missouri Supreme Court Justice, Ronnie White. I was highly concerned. I watched the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings. There, I saw a different story. I learned that Messrs. White and Ashcroft were skillful and brilliant players at the game of legislative hardball.

Mr. White, while a state legislator, used his powerful committee chairmanship position to engage in political jousting with then Governor Ashcroft. Years later, Mr. Ashcroft continued the jousting by using his influence as a Senator to defeat Mr. White's nomination to become a federal district judge.

The defeat of Justice White was hardball, not racism. Mr. White himself testified that John Ashcroft was not a racist.

2. It is time for America to have an Attorney General who will enforce the law equally and fairly for all Americans.

As Black Americans, we see the problem of crime in America up close and personal. Black Americans are among its greatest victims. For us, it is particularly important that the enforcement of our law be strong, effective and fair.

Mr. Ashcroft has also promised to investigate all alleged voting rights violations, particularly those lodged in Florida in the aftermath of last Fall's election. We expect him to prosecute any criminal violations if federal laws protecting voting rights were broken in Florida.

3. It is time to restore civility and dignity to the Senate confirmation process.

Americans have watched the Senate confirmation process

deteriorate over the years since the Robert Bork nomination in 1987. What used to be a calm exploration of a nominee's qualifications often now becomes a trial by ordeal. Both political parties decry the so-called ``politics of personal destruction'' and then eagerly employ it. Special interest groups on all sides regard a confirmation battle as a fundraising opportunity and a test of strength, regardless of its impact on the nominee. A vote for John Ashcroft will not, in itself, restore civility to the confirmation process, but it will help.

It is time for all Americans to stop fighting the outcome of last Fall's election and give President Bush a chance to govern. President Bush has selected a diverse and inclusive cabinet. We must give his team an opportunity to lead this nation. If Mr. Ashcroft does not live up to his commitment to enforce our federal laws on an even-handed basis, we can deal with that in the political arena at a later date. Until then, we should respect President Bush's choice for Attorney General.

Sincerely,

Donald V. Watkins,
Founder and Chairman.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, the letter was paid for by Donald V. Watkins of Birmingham, Alabama. He is one of Alabama's most prominent African American leaders, and he is an attorney. I went to law school with Don.

He has been an active Democrat. He says in his letter that he supported the Gore-Lieberman ticket this time. He has been a lawyer for the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a trial attorney, and ``a staunch supporter of each organization's missions and goals.''

Don says it is time for us to restore civility and dignity to the Senate confirmation process. In effect, he says that President Bush has been elected. He made some promises. He promised to have a more diverse Cabinet. This civil rights advocate, this skilled lawyer says that he has followed those commitments and that what the African American community should do is to insist that he follows the other commitments he made and judge him on what he does, because he is the President, and we should give him a fair chance to succeed.

He says John Ashcroft should be confirmed. Quoting from the letter:

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I think that says it well. I had no advance notice of this. I had no idea this would appear from this fine and skilled advocate for equal rights in America.

I want to share a few matters that are important to correct. They