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WASHINGTON (ABP)-Socially conservative groups have expressed support-and civil-liberties groups have expressed concern-over President Bush's selection of Alberto Gonzales to replace John Ashcroft as attorney general.

Bush nominated Gonzales, who serves as the White House's chief lawyer, to the position one day after Ashcroft announced his resignation.

Gonzales generally is considered less ideologically rigid than Ashcroft, who had strong support from the Religious Right.

The move means-at least for now-Gonzales is likely not to be nominated by Bush to the Supreme Court.

As a result, groups that have expressed suspicion about the idea of Gonzales as a future justice on the high court instead offered cautious support for his nomination to the nation's top law-enforcement job.

“We look forward to Alberto Gonzales—when he is confirmed as attorney general—continuing the tough policies instituted by Attorney General Ashcroft against terrorists,” said Roberta Combs, president of the Christian Coalition.

Meanwhile, Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said he was confident Gonzales would adequately represent the government in the federal courts to defend laws on abortion, same-sex marriage and other issues.

“The opponents of state marriage initiatives are now filing federal court challenges. The proponents of legal abortion have successfully challenged the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban, which now heads to the U.S. Supreme Court,” Perkins said. “We are confident as the nation's top lawyer, Mr. Gonzales will offer a strong defense of these measures which protect marriage and the unborn.”

But civil-liberties groups expressed concern about Gonzales' record on human-rights issues. In particular, they urged senators to examine Gonzales closely about his views on prisoners' rights. A 2002 memorandum, written by Gonzales, stirred controversy when it was unearthed during the height of the scandal over abuses of Iraqi prisoners committed by American soldiers at the Abu Ghraib prison, outside Baghdad.

In the memo, Gonzales described some of the protections provided to prisoners under the Geneva Convention as “obsolete” and “quaint.”

In addition, Gonzales angered civil libertarians when he OKed a Justice Department memo that condoned some forms of torture and indefinite detainment of prisoners captured by American troops in Afghanistan.

The American Civil Liberties Union issued a statement asking senators to take these issues and others into account when considering Gonzales' nomination.

“It is the Senate's duty to make certain that the next attorney general is committed to enforcing the civil rights laws that are critical to protecting the American value of fairness,” the statement read.

“It is imperative that the Senate demands that the next leader of the Department of Justice restore the strength and integrity of the civil rights division.”

Ashcroft engendered significant controversy when Bush nominated him as attorney general in 2000.

He continued to be a lightning rod for criticism throughout his term from both liberals and conservatives concerned with civil liberties.

Gonzales, the son of Mexican immigrants to Texas, would become the nation's first Hispanic attorney general if confirmed. Before coming to the White House, he served as Texas' secretary of state and as a member of the Texas Supreme Court.

Some of his actions in Texas and in the White House—particularly on issues of abortion and affirmative action—have caused him to be eyed with suspicion by some social conservatives.

But Bush was effusive in his praise for Gonzales, a close personal friend.

In announcing his nomination, Bush said: “As the nation's chief law enforcement officer, Al will continue our administration's great progress in fighting crime, in strengthening the FBI, in improving our domestic efforts in the war on terror.

“As a steward of civil-rights laws, he will ensure that Americans are protected from discrimination so that each person has the opportunity to live the American Dream, as Al himself has done.”

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