

By Coloradoan Staff

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The Character Fort Collins Board of Directors announced today John Ashcroft will not be a featured speaker in the group's 2011 Courageous Leadership Series.

In a press release, the group stated:

"It has become clear that this opportunity to have John Ashcroft speak in Fort Collins has evolved past a manageable nonprofit event. As such, the Character Fort Collins Board of Directors has decided not to include John Ashcroft in our 2011 Courageous Leadership Series. We are continuing to work on the line up of speakers for our Courageous Leadership Series and will announce those when they are finalized."

Cheryl Distaso, with Fort Collins' Strength Through Peace, a group that urged for Character Fort Collins to rescind the invitation to Ashcroft and promised to demonstrate if Ashcroft spoke in the city, said she was pleased with the news.

"I think it's a huge victory for Strength Through Peace," Distaso said. "I think Strength Through Peace did an excellent job in bringing this discussion to the community. The discussion in the community is an excellent indication that the community believes there are courageous leaders and then there are people like John Ashcroft. John Ashcroft worked to take away our most revered rights and he's not a courageous leader."

Ashcroft was attorney general under former President George W. Bush, serving from 2001 to 2005.

Character Fort Collins is a nonprofit organization that advances and promotes the communitywide character initiative. The group says it exists to encourage, support and resource individuals, businesses and organizations in their efforts to lead, develop and model good behavior.

Members of the Character Fort Collins Board of Directors have declined comment this afternoon and calls to the group's Fort Collins office have gone unanswered.

Following is the complete press release issued by Character Fort Collins:
The Character Fort Collins Board of Directors' decision to invite John Ashcroft to speak as part of our 2011 Courageous Leadership Series has generated a good deal of discussion which we view as a healthy development.

Many people who previously had no engagement with the community-wide character initiative are now involved.

With this growing participation, it is appropriate to review how Character Fort Collins is working to build up our community of character. We believe character transcends race, age, religion, education, position, gender and personality. Our working definition of character is “Character is the inward motivation to do what is right.”

Our decision to invite Mr. Ashcroft represented a good-faith effort to hear from someone who confronted the challenges of making character-based decisions at the highest levels in times of extreme crisis.

We continue to believe that we all benefit from understanding the very real challenges involved in making difficult choices with imperfect information. That’s the struggle at the heart of Courageous Leadership.

Communities of Character need to be able to have people that disagree come together and engage in civil discourse and find areas where there is agreement and respect one another in areas where they disagree.

It has become clear that this opportunity to have John Ashcroft speak in Fort Collins has evolved past a manageable non-profit event. As such, the Character Fort Collins Board of Directors’ has decided not to include John Ashcroft in our 2011 Courageous Leadership Series. We are continuing to work on the line up of speakers for our Courageous Leadership Series and will announce those when they are finalized.

We stand firm in our belief that our community, and our nation, grows stronger through healthy, respectful dialogue based on the qualities of character and integrity.

Respectively,
Character Fort Collins Board of Directors
Brett Kemp
Bonnie Titley
Chris Otto
Laurie Stolen
Lorna Reeves
Mike Demma
Mike Haddorff