

Mayor-elect Larry Langford gave Hoover Asst. Police Chief A.C. Roper a special birthday present Tuesday: he announced Roper as Birmingham's new police chief at yesterday's Jefferson County Commission meeting.

"He had his birthday today, but the real gift is to the City of Birmingham," Langford said of Roper's appointment.

Roper, who turned 44, is likely one of the youngest police chiefs in the city's history. He said Langford chose him because of his youth, his energy and the military background he will bring to the police department.

Hoover Police Chief Nick Derzis - whom Langford said was never a candidate for the job - approached Roper at Langford's request to help recruit his second in command. "I hate to lose him," Derzis said of Roper "but I think it's a win-win for everyone."

Both Derzis and Langford said Roper's appointment will mean more cooperation with Hoover and other police departments and law enforcement in the county.

After an emotional start to his speech at the meeting, Roper said he sees so much hopelessness and despair in the city, and he wants to change that, though he knows it will take time, and it will be a challenge. He said he consulted with others, that he and his wife prayed, and he did a lot of soul-searching about taking the job. "This was the best move, not for us personally, but for the people of Birmingham," he said.

Roper is an assistant pastor at Faith Chapel Christian Church, but don't let that fool you, Langford said. "He will quote you Scripture all the way to jail."

Roper finished his speech to the commission with a quip to Langford: "In the dark days ahead, I want to remind you, that you offered ME the job," he said with a laugh.

In a short press conference after his presentation, Roper said he expects Langford will give him the latitude to do his job as chief. The 21-year police veteran said he will lead by example by setting a vision, establishing goals, and creating standards of ethics, honor, dignity and dedication for the force.

"I do believe in setting expectations and holding people accountable," the Birmingham native said. "With great challenges also come great opportunities . . . I'm not intimidated or afraid. (Changing the crime situation in Birmingham) didn't happen overnight. It will take time and it will take resources."

Langford said he would not micromanage the chief or any of his other appointees. "My job is to surround myself with smart people and get out of their way. It's up to them to hire people to come help them do what they need to do."

Besides his military approach to his leadership, Roper brings a strong faith-based approach, Langford said, "and that's what the city needs right now."

**NOTE:** Contributor Vickii Howell is the editor in chief of [Birmingham View](#).