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## Chertoff's challenges

Editorial  
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THE BIGGEST plus in the nomination of Michael Chertoff as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security is his evident commitment to the mission of keeping the nation safe. Otherwise he would not give up a lifetime appointment as a federal appeals court judge to take on a job with all the uncertainties and bureaucratic tangles of this one.

His predecessor, Tom Ridge, won praise for presiding over the merger of 22 agencies with 180,000 employees and for keeping the country free of any new terrorist attacks. Critics faulted Ridge for his color-coded danger warnings and, more important, his failure to get the federal government to plug some of the obvious gaps in security or to agree on a common watch list of terror suspects.

Last week's train accident in South Carolina, which caused the release of chlorine gas and the deaths of at least nine people, is just one reminder of how vulnerable the nation's industrial and transportation infrastructure is. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 123 facilities with chemicals as dangerous as chlorine occupy sites that are close to 1 million or more residents.

Ridge tried to get mandatory safety rules for such plants, but the administration settled on voluntary measures after leaders of the petroleum and chemical industries met with Bush's White House aide Karl Rove. Before voting to confirm Chertoff, senators like Jon Corzine of New Jersey, who has advocated tougher rules for industry, should exact a promise of stronger action from him on this issue and on the surveillance of cargo coming into American ports and the uninspected commercial cargo that passenger planes carry in their holds.

Chertoff's record as an assistant attorney general under John Ashcroft has raised concerns about his support for civil liberties. After Sept. 11, he supported the roundup of 762 foreign nationals from the Mideast and South Asia for immigration violations. In a process that was later sharply criticized by the Justice Department's inspector general, the detainees were held incommunicado for months. No charges of terrorism were brought against any of them.

However, Chertoff also wrote an article in 2003 criticizing the administration's practice of holding enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for extended periods without charges. When he was a federal prosecutor in New Jersey, he led efforts to reduce racial profiling by New Jersey police.

Another question mark over Chertoff's nomination is his lack of management experience. If he is to prevail where Ridge failed in getting agreement on the watch list or better infrastructure security, he will need to forge coalitions and wage public relations campaigns. The Senate should press Chertoff for evidence that he can improve homeland security and protect the Bill of Rights.