

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

Senate confirms Chertoff as Homeland secretary

February 16, 2005
Associated Press

Washington - The Senate on Tuesday confirmed federal Judge Michael Chertoff as the nation's second Homeland Security secretary, placing the tough- on-terrorism former prosecutor in charge of a bureaucracy prone to infighting and turf wars.

Chertoff, 51, has promised to balance protecting the country with preserving civil liberties as head of the agency that was created as a result of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

The 98-0 vote came nearly two weeks after Chertoff faced pointed questioning from Democrats about his role in developing the U.S. investigation immediately after the attacks.

Chertoff headed the Justice Department's criminal division when hundreds of foreigners were swept up on relatively minor charges and held for an average of 80 days. Some detainees were denied their right to see an attorney, were not told of the charges against them or were physically abused.

Chertoff defended the investigation strategy but conceded it "had not always been executed perfectly."

Few expected Chertoff to face opposition in the Senate. But his confirmation was delayed by Sen. Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan, to protest being denied Justice Department information about the treatment of terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay.

Levin unsuccessfully sought an unedited copy of a secret FBI memo from May 2004 that discussed interrogation techniques to see if it mentioned or involved Chertoff. The department denied Levin's request but said the memo did not refer to Chertoff "by name or otherwise."

Known as a fiery, wiry workhorse, Chertoff had previously been confirmed three times - as a 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judge, Justice Department assistant attorney general and U.S. attorney in New Jersey.

He takes over the 180,000-employee Homeland Security Department as a new merit pay system is replacing a system of salaries based on workers' seniority .