

Chertoff chides left, right over bill; Says opposition may hurt interests of both

USA TODAY

May 24, 2007 Thursday, FINAL EDITION

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 613 words

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Body

McLEAN, Va. -- Homeland Security Secretary Michael **Chertoff said** Wednesday that Republican conservatives working to block an immigration **bill** risk endorsing a "silent amnesty" by insisting on deportations that are "not going to happen."

Chertoff also leveled criticism at liberal immigrant **rights** advocates, **saying** they could prolong the anguish of immigrant families by withholding support for legislation that could make them legal.

His warnings came in an 80-minute appearance he and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez made before the USA TODAY editorial board. The two men's appearance is a preview of a media blitz by the Bush administration as Congress prepares to go on a week-long Memorial Day recess that will give **both** sides in the emotional debate a chance to sway senators on a **bill** President Bush wants as part of his legacy.

The Homeland Security secretary **said** he canceled an overseas trip to help. In addition, the president is expected to stump for the **bill** next week and a "rapid response" team is countering critics, not only in the conventional media but, for the first time, on Internet blogs, **said** White House communications director Kevin Sullivan. The president's press secretary, Tony Snow, already has debated talk radio host Rush Limbaugh and TV commentator Lou Dobbs, **both** critics of the **bill**.

Chertoff acknowledged that there is "a fundamental unfairness" in a **bill** allowing illegal immigrants to stay. But trying to force them to leave would be impossible, **Chertoff said**, "We are bowing to reality."

He dismissed the argument of Republican conservatives, such as Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Calif., who argue that illegal immigrants will leave if strict enforcement of U.S. laws makes it impossible for them to find a job.

"You're not going to replace 12 million people who are doing the work they're currently doing," **Chertoff said**. "If they don't leave, then you are going to give them silent amnesty. You're either going to let them stay or you're going to be hypocritical."

Bilbray **said** his idea hasn't worked because "there's been a conscious strategy of not enforcing the law."

Chertoff, whose department has staged a number of recent raids that have resulted in mass roundups of illegal workers and sharp protests from religious groups, warned there will be more if the workers don't get a chance to become legal. "We're going to enforce the law," he **said**. "People all around the country will be seeing teary-eyed children whose parents are going to be deported."

Both he and Gutierrez warned that major changes could kill the compromise **bill**.

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Kevin Appleby of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops rejected what he called the "take it or leave it" argument. "The groups who represent those who don't have a voice in the debate want to get the best deal possible," he **said**.

Gutierrez addressed another controversial aspect of the immigration **bill**, a program to expand the number of foreigners who can work temporarily in the USA. The Senate on Wednesday voted to reduce the number of guest workers from 400,000 to 200,000 a year, a move Gutierrez called "a bit concerning."

The USA needs more foreign workers as baby boomers retire, the Commerce secretary **said**. His department's figures show the population ages 25-54 growing at 0.2% a year while the workforce is growing at 1.2% a year.

"The reality is, we don't have enough people," **said** Gutierrez, adding that many of the USA's economic competitors, such as France, Germany, Japan and China, will be facing a similar demographic shift. "The big challenge of the 21st century is: Who gets the people? Who gets the immigrants?" he **said**. "We don't appreciate today that these people are coming in for free."

Graphic

PHOTO, Color, USA TODAY

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: NEWSPAPER

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (90%); NATIONAL SECURITY (90%); IMMIGRATION REGULATION & POLICY (90%); CONSERVATISM (90%); US PRESIDENTS (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); DEPORTATION (89%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); LIBERALISM (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (76%); FAMILY (76%); CONFERENCES & CONVENTIONS (74%); COMMERCE DEPARTMENTS (73%); CHRISTIANS & CHRISTIANITY (68%); BLOGS & MESSAGE BOARDS (66%); CATHOLICS & CATHOLICISM (63%); CLERGY & RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS (60%); RELIGION (60%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (91%)

Industry: BLOGS & MESSAGE BOARDS (66%); INTERNATIONAL TOURISM (53%)

Person: MICHAEL **CHERTOFF** (79%); BRIAN P BILBRAY (78%); CARLOS GUTIERREZ (58%); RUSH LIMBAUGH (58%)

Geographic: VIRGINIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

Load-Date: May 24, 2007

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