

Tom Ridge to resign from homeland security post

The seventh officer to leave Bush's Cabinet said he may stay through Feb. 1

BY KATHERINE PFLEGER SHRADER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Tom Ridge, the nation's first homeland security secretary, announced Tuesday that he is resigning after three years of working American security and presiding over color-coded terror alerts. He's the seventh Bush Cabinet officer leaving so far.

Ridge oversaw the most significant government reorganization in 50 years. He'll be remembered for his terror alerts and tutorials about how to prepare for possible attacks, including the controversial "disaster kits" that caused last year's run on duct tape and plastic sheeting.

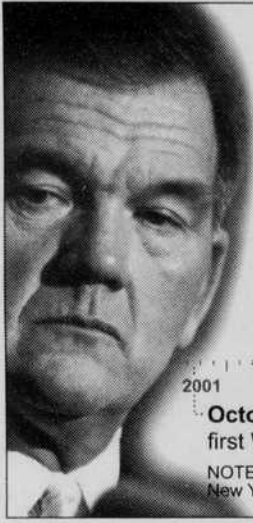
Amid warnings that the country may face increased terror risks around the holidays and the Jan. 20 presidential inauguration, Ridge said he will remain on the job through Feb. 1, unless his replacement is installed sooner.

Ridge acknowledged he could not prove the costly and complex security measures that have been put in place have foiled any terrorist attacks inside the United States, but he said the country is safer today than before the suicide hijackings on Sept. 11, 2001, killed nearly 3,000 people in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

"I am confident that the terrorists are aware that from the curb to the cockpit we've got additional security measures that didn't exist a couple years ago," Ridge told reporters at the department's Washington campus, which he helped create.

"His efforts have resulted in safer skies, increased border and port security and enhanced measures to safeguard our critical infrastructure and the American public," Bush said in a prepared statement Tuesday evening.

Ridge sent his letter of resignation to President Bush at midday Tuesday, after attending a morning White House threat briefing with CIA and FBI officials. The former Pennsylvania



Ridge resigns

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, who presided over six "orange alerts," announced his resignation Tuesday.

Risk of terrorist attack

March 12 — Color-coded threat level begins

Yellow "elevated" Orange "high"

2001 2002 2003 2004

October — Ridge was sworn in as the nation's first White House homeland security adviser

NOTE: 2004 orange alert was for select financial institutions in New York, northern New Jersey and Washington, D.C. only

SOURCE: Department of Homeland Security AP

governor thanked Bush for giving him the opportunity to fight back against terrorists. He recalled that the passengers on Flight 93 who forced their hijacked plane down in a Pennsylvania field had also fought back.

"There will always be more to do, but today, America is significantly stronger and safer than ever before," Ridge wrote Bush.

Ridge is the seventh of Bush's 15-member Cabinet to announce they won't be part of the second term. More are expected, and administration officials say Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson appears to be next.

Among those mentioned as possible candidates to replace Ridge are Bernard Kerik, the former New York City police commissioner who helped rebuild Iraq's police force; former Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Joe Albaugh; Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Mike Leavitt; and White House homeland security adviser Fran Townsend.

Others are also believed to be interested in the job, including Asa Hutchinson, undersecretary for border and transportation security in the Homeland Security Department.

Ridge leaves behind a department that's still learning to work together. Culled from 22 often disparate federal agencies, the

180,000-employee organization still faces criticism over aspects of its massive government merger, including the coordination of finances to computer systems.

Ridge, consistently a defender of the department, stood by its efforts to warn the public of possible terror threats, saying it preferred to disclose more information than some officials believed was wise.

"That's something we take pride in," Ridge said. "America is prepared to deal with the reality of the post-9/11 world. It's in our best long-term interest to share more information about the threat to America rather than less."

Ridge, who is married with two children, said that for the future he intends to "raise some family and personal matters to a higher priority," including attending his son's rugby games.

In October 2001, Ridge became the nation's first White House homeland security adviser, leading a massive undertaking to rethink all aspects of security within the U.S. borders in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Congress subsequently passed legislation establishing the Homeland Security Department, with Ridge taking over as the department's first secretary in January 2003.

High-schoolers consider studying in foreign locales

Many popular destinations abroad report growing percentages of U.S. students applying to colleges

BY JUSTIN POPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — For some, it's about the adventure of an extended stay at a foreign university. For others, it's about saving money or just getting farther away from home.

Whatever the reason, as they send out their college applications, attending school outside the United States is an option more high school students appear to be considering. Foreign universities are urging them on, smoothing the logistics and riding the U.S. college fair circuit to talk up their opportunities and often lower price tags.

No overall statistics are available, but the number of U.S. students pursuing degrees in some popular destination countries is growing:

In Canada, the number of American undergraduates and graduate students has more than doubled since 1997, to about 6,000.

In Great Britain, the number of full-time American undergrads is up 53 percent since 2001 to about 2,300.

About 1,600 Americans are pursuing undergraduate degrees in Australia; the growth rate isn't available, but the overall number of Americans pursuing some form of study there rose 10 percent last year.

"We feel it's a) high quality, b) good value and c) it's going to give the students a very different educational experience," said Karen McBride, vice president for international affairs at the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

While roughly 175,000 students at American universities go abroad for a limited stay — nine times out of 10 for a semester or less — applicants see enrolling full time as a chance for a richer experience.

"I don't think I'm going to miss

out," said Susan Schell, a high school senior from Birmingham, Ala., who is applying to several universities in England. She hopes to work in Europe and thinks attending college there will help. To her, an American college wouldn't be all that different from high school.

"It seems to me, talking to people that live in Europe, that there's a different aura," she said. "The pace of living there is so beautiful."

Sinead Keegan from Boston who is now in her final year at McGill University in Montreal, said she has gained a degree of independence — socially and academically — she wouldn't have gotten in the United States.

"It doesn't suit everybody, but I think I'm better prepared to head out into the real world than people who have had their hands held all along," she said.

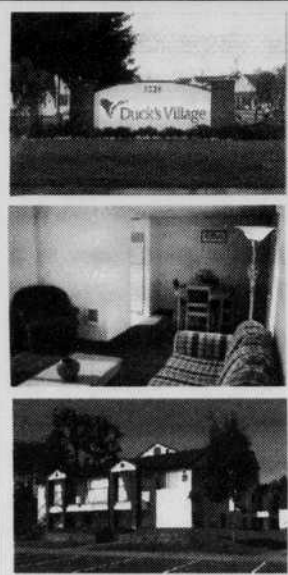
McGill has tripled its enrollment of American undergraduates to more than 1,800 in less than a decade. Recruiters visit 150 U.S. high schools and college fairs each year, according to Howard Tontini, the school's recruiting director.

Many foreign schools are making the application process easier — often they consider the same materials, such as SAT scores and high-school transcripts, that American colleges require. Many guidance counselors say they encourage students to explore the option.

"We probably would get behind that, depending on the person, depending on the major," said Tom Hughart, guidance director at Wellesley High School in Massachusetts, who says he has noticed stepped-up recruiting by Scottish universities. "Someone who wants to teach English literature, going over to Trinity (College) in Dublin

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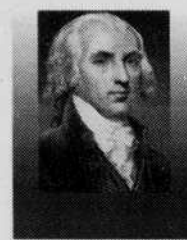
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