

New York Times
April 1, 2005

World Bank Vote Confirms Wolfowitz Unanimously
by Elizabeth Becker

WASHINGTON, March 31 - Paul D. Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary and one of the administration's earliest advocates of invading Iraq, was unanimously confirmed Thursday as the new president of the World Bank in a vote by the institution's executive board.

President Bush nominated Mr. Wolfowitz two weeks ago for the post, which has always been held by an American.

"It is humbling to be entrusted with the leadership of this critically important international institution," Mr. Wolfowitz, 61, said Thursday.

The World Bank, which has 184 member countries, provided \$20 billion for 245 development projects in 2004. When Mr. Wolfowitz begins his five-year term in June, he will immediately face decisions about how to encourage the world's wealthiest nations to increase aid to the poor, meet the United Nations' development goals and offer debt relief to the poorest nations.

Mr. Wolfowitz brings to his new position varied experience from government and academia. He is a former professor of political science and dean of the Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. He also held important posts in the State and Defense Departments under President Ronald Reagan and the first President George Bush, gaining a reputation for promoting the spread of American-style democracy around the world, sometimes with the use of American military might.

The White House announced Thursday that Gordon R. England, secretary of the Navy, would be nominated to succeed Mr. Wolfowitz.

Mr. Wolfowitz's reputation has brought loud criticism of the World Bank nomination from Europe and from private groups that champion aid for the poor. Nevertheless, the board's approval of him to be the 10th president of the international development institution was never in doubt.

The other largest shareholders of the World Bank - Japan, Germany, France and Britain - signed off almost immediately on his appointment, and no country offered an alternative candidate.

As one European official said, "No one was enthusiastic but no one was fighting."

Mr. Wolfowitz mounted a serious campaign to convince all 24 executive directors of the bank that he understood its mission as the world's leading development agency and would not use the presidency to promote the goals of the Bush administration. He repeated what the directors wanted to hear: that he respected the multilateral nature of the institution and its overall goal of eradicating world poverty through loans, aid and advice.

He succeeded.

In a signed statement released Thursday, the eight European executive directors at the bank said that they were convinced of Mr. Wolfowitz's "unreserved commitment to the bank's mission of poverty reduction" and were confident that he would not change the focus from African nations and other countries most in need.

The directors representing the 108 developing countries at the bank said in a separate statement that Mr. Wolfowitz had assured them that his loyalty was to the bank and "to no other authority."

James Mann, the author of "Rise of the Vulcans," which chronicles the role of the neoconservatives in the Bush administration, said: "Under the surface, I think he and the White House have different agendas for this appointment. For Wolfowitz, this is taking on a new area but for the Bush White House this is putting in the bank a guy who has been one of the most closely involved with advising the president on foreign policy."

Critics, while acknowledging that Mr. Wolfowitz may prove to be an accomplished leader, say they worry that he will provoke renewed antagonism toward the bank just as the open hostility demonstrated in the last decade had begun to wane.

A small band of protesters gathered Thursday morning outside the World Bank's modern headquarters here, just blocks from the White House, criticizing Mr. Wolfowitz and his stance on the Iraq war. The Global Justice Ecology Project, one of the groups criticizing the appointment, said it feared that Mr. Wolfowitz would be "the link between shooting wars and economic wars."

Jessica P. Einhorn, who succeeded Mr. Wolfowitz at the School for Advanced International Study, predicted that he would surprise the critics.

"The kind of idealism that motivated what many think are his errors in Iraq is in fact the kind of inspirational leadership that may be needed in the bank," she said. "I think you can turn this around and see he has a belief in the human spirit."

He will succeed James D. Wolfensohn, a wealthy former Wall Street financier who managed to win over many of his critics who had said he lacked the experience to lead one of the world's largest, most unwieldy bureaucracies.

Mr. Wolfowitz is known as an intellectual rather than a manager and is expected to rely on strong assistants to help him run the organization.

As the bank's president, Mr. Wolfowitz will have significant power to decide what projects are approved and to hire and fire personnel.

To ensure a strong voice in these decisions, the countries that might have blocked him have won agreement from Mr. Wolfowitz that he will appoint several managing directors, especially from Europe.