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Senate Democrats Seek to Delay Confirmation Vote on Secretary of State Nominee

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U.S. Senate Democrats are demanding time on the Senate floor to debate the nomination of Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State. Their efforts may delay a confirmation vote for Ms. Rice until next week.

Senate Republican leaders had planned for the full Senate to vote on the nomination of Ms. Rice, who is expected to be easily confirmed, shortly after President Bush is sworn in to office for a second term Thursday afternoon.

But a spokesman for Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid says a number of Democrats want an extended period of time to speak about Ms. Rice's nomination and administration foreign policy. That could delay the vote until next week.

On Wednesday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved Ms. Rice's nomination by a 16 to two vote and sent it to the full Senate for consideration.

Two Democrats opposed the nomination, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, who unsuccessfully challenged President Bush for the White House last year, and Senator Barbara Boxer of California, who criticized the administration for refusing to make changes in what she sees as misguided Iraq policy.

?There seems to be a rigidness here, a lack of flexibility, which is so troubling to me,? she said.

On the second day of confirmation hearings, Ms. Rice admitted that the administration made some mistakes in Iraq in not being fully prepared for the reconstruction effort, and in training Iraqi police officers.

?I would be the first to say, we have made a lot of decisions, some of them good, some of them bad,? said Ms. Rice.

She added that the problems are being addressed.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Republican Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana, said Ms. Rice is well qualified to be Secretary of State, and said the close relationship she developed with President Bush as National Security Adviser would be an asset.

?She does have the ear of the President,? he said.

Ms. Rice said she would be candid in offering advice to the President, and vowed to work to improve America's image abroad.

At the State Department, outgoing Secretary Colin Powell bid farewell to employees there. Mr. Powell intends to stay on the job until Ms. Rice is sworn in to succeed him.