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US' Gonzales confirmation stalled

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US Democrats have forced a delay in a Senate vote on Alberto Gonzales' nomination to be US attorney general.

Democrats say Mr Gonzales has been evasive about his role in drafting White House policy on interrogating terror suspects.

They have also forced a delay in the final Senate confirmation of Secretary of State nominee Condoleezza Rice.

The Senate foreign relations committee approved Ms Rice on Wednesday.

Ms Rice was expected to be confirmed on Thursday, in time for the inauguration of President George W Bush for his second term on Thursday.

She faced two days of tough questioning by the committee and defended the first Bush administration's record over Iraq.

'Straight' answers

Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy led the push to stall Mr Gonzales' nomination.

"He still has not provided serious, consistent, and responsive answers to this committee's questions," Mr Kennedy said in a statement.

The vote by the Senate judiciary committee is now expected to take place next week.

At his confirmation hearing two weeks ago, Mr Gonzales denied paving the way for the abuse of terror suspects held at US-run prison facilities in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But in answers to written questions since that hearing, Mr Gonzales has resorted to "gross evasion and non-responsiveness," Mr Kennedy said.

"Our committee can't keep looking the other way on this issue. Mr Gonzales must give us straight answers to our questions," he said.