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Democrats to issue subpoenas to Rice, Republican National Committee Now in majority, Democratic committee chairs drive wide-ranging probes of GOP administration.

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WASHINGTON — Moving closer to a confrontation with the White House, congressional Democrats today voted to issue subpoenas to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the Republican National Committee as part of wide-ranging investigations into the Bush administration's actions.

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, headed by Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), voted to issue the subpoenas over the objections of Republicans.

"This is just politics," said Rep. Tom Davis of Virginia, the committee's top Republican. He accused Waxman of using the subpoenas to get high-profile administration figures under oath, before the cameras, "for the sake of political theatrics."

The committee action came as Congress also heads for a showdown with the White House over a timetable for withdrawing troops from Iraq.

Waxman defended the subpoenas, the latest to be issued by Congress' new Democratic majority, which has made aggressive oversight a priority.

"My goal is to conduct investigations without subpoenas," Waxman said. "But if we are stonewalled, we can't hesitate to use the power we have."

The subpoena for Rice is part of Waxman's investigation into President Bush's discredited pre-war claim that Saddam Hussein had sought to buy uranium from the African country of Niger. The subpoena for the Republican National Committee comes in Waxman's probe of whether Bush administration officials -- including the president's chief political strategist, Karl Rove -- have attempted to circumvent the Presidential Records Act, a post-Watergate law designed to preserve White House records, by using RNC e-mail accounts to conduct government business.

Congressional investigators uncovered the use of the RNC e-mail addresses by White House staffers as they looked into the role of politics in the firing of eight U.S. attorneys. The subpoena gives the RNC two weeks to produce a list of the estimated 50 to 60 White House officials who have held RNC e-mail accounts.

It also asks RNC Chairman Robert M. "Mike" Duncan to appear before the congressional committee. The RNC accused Democrats of attempting to get the party's political playbook.

"You don't see the New York Yankees giving the Boston Red Sox their signs before a crucial series -- and I won't be giving our equivalent to Howard Dean," Duncan said in a statement.

Objecting to the Rice subpoena, Davis said that questions about the faulty pre-war intelligence had been repeatedly "asked and answered."

Waxman declared that he had tried for four years to get information from Rice on the reference to uranium in the president's 2003 State of the Union speech and other issues but has "hit a brick wall."

"The secretary of state is giving us no choice but to proceed with a subpoena," Waxman said.

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