

the votes.

Now Mr. Mollenhoff.

Controversy Over Gray

Q. Mr. President, Mr. Gray has been up before the Senate Judiciary Committee, and he has been under attack for political speeches in 1972, and there is a controversy about those that are or are not political speeches. I wonder if you have looked at those, whether you have a view on that, and it seemed to me the most vulnerable point was a memo from Patrick O'Donnell from the White House that was distributed to all the surrogates for the President that went to Pat Gray on the Cleveland situation, and it involved a setting out of how crucial Ohio was in the campaign in 1972, and I wonder if you felt that was a breach of your instructions relative to the politics of Pat Gray, and whether you had investigated this.

A. Well, Mr. Mollenhoff, that is a very proper question. I mean I would not suggest other questions are improper, but it is a very proper question because when I appointed Mr. Gray, as you remember, I said I was not going to send his name last year because I felt that we should wait until we got past the political campaign so that the Senate could consider it in a nonpolitical and nonpartisan atmosphere, and the Senate is now doing that.

As far as Mr. Gray is concerned—and not the individual, but the director of the F.B.I.—he must be, as Mr. Hoover was before him, a nonpartisan figure. He should not be involved in making political statements and that does not mean, if we look at Mr. Hoover's record, that he will not say some things that will not sound political at times, but it means that he must not become involved in partisan politics, supporting a candidate, opposing a candidate, and Mr. Gray, on the basis of what I have seen, had no intention of doing so. If there was anything indicating that during the campaign that we were trying to enlist him in that it certainly didn't have my support and would not have it now.

I would also say, too, that the current Senate investigation or hearing, I should say, of Mr. Gray, is altogether proper. They should ask him all these questions. I want the people of this country to have confidence in the director of the F.B.I. I had confidence in him when I nominated him.

I believe that the Senate will find, based on his record since he was nominated, that he has been fair, he has been efficient and that he will be a good, shall we say, lawman in the tradition of J. Edgar Hoover and I am sure that the Senate will overwhelmingly approve him.

10. F.B.I. and Mrs. Mitchell

Q. Mr. President, do you think it is fair and efficient for Mr. Gray and the F.B.I. not to question Mrs. Mitchell when they think there was cause to because her husband was a former Attorney General and campaign official of yours?

A. With regard to other questions on Mr. Gray, it has always been my practice, as you ladies and gentlemen know, not to comment on a hearing while it is in process. This is a matter that was brought up in the hearing.

I am sure that if the members of the Senate feel that that was an improper activity in his part, they will question him about it and he will answer it, but whether it is this hearing or any other hearing, I will not comment on a hearing while it is in process.

My answer to Mr. Mollenhoff stated a principle. Your question goes to a matter that the committee has a right to look into and the answer should come from the committee.

11. Crisis in the Sudan

Q. Mr. President, we have a crisis, of course, in the Sudan where the States ambassador is being held and one of the ransoms is Sirhan Surhan. If you have any information...

NO, I do not think that rent is the right answer. I think the answer to the problem of rents is production of housing which will deal with it.

17. Watergate Implications

Q. Mr. President, now that the Watergate case is over, the trial is over, can you give us your view on the verdict and what implications you see in the verdict on public confidence in the political system?

A. No, it would not be proper for me to comment on the case when it not only is not over, but particularly when it is also on appeal.

I will simply say with regard to the Watergate case what I have said previously that the investigation conducted by Mr. Dean, the White House counsel, in which, incidentally, he had access to the F.B.I. records on this particular matter because I directed him to conduct this investigation, indicates that no one on the White House staff, at the time he conducted the investigation—that was last July and August—was involved or had knowledge of the Watergate matter and, as far as the balance of the case is concerned, it is now under investigation by a Congressional committee and that committee should go forward, conduct its investigation in an even-handed way, going into charges made against both candidates, both political parties, and if it does, as Senator Ervin has indicated it will, we will, of course cooperate with the committee just as we cooperated with the grand jury.

18. Executive Privilege

Q. Mr. President, yesterday at the Gray hearings, Senator Tunney suggested he might ask the committee to ask for John Dean to appear before that hearing to talk about the Watergate case and the F.B.I.-White House relationship. Would you object to that?

A. Of course.

Q. Why? A. Well, because it is executive privilege. I mean you can't—I, of course—no President could ever agree to allow the counsel to the President to go down and testify before a committee.

On the other hand, as far as any committee of the Congress is concerned, where information is requested that a member of the White House staff may have, we will make arrangements to provide that information, but members of the White House staff, in that position at least, cannot be brought before a Congressional committee in a formal hearing for testimony. I stand on the same position every President has stood on.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Q. Mr. President, on that particular point, if the counsel was involved—

A. He also gets two.

Q. If the counsel was involved in an illegal or improper act and the prima facie case came to light, then would you change the rules relative to the White House counsel?

A. I do not expect that to happen and if it should happen I would have to answer that question at that point.

Let me say, too, that I know that since you are on your feet, Clark, that you had asked about the executive privilege statement and we will have that available toward the end of next week or the first of the following week, for sure, because obviously the Ervin committee is interested in that statement and that will answer, I think, some of the questions with regard to how information can be obtained from a member of the White House staff, but consistent with executive privilege.

Q. Thank you again.