

Capitol Punishment

Embarrassment Red to Battleship Gray

By Art Buchwald

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Rumor has it in Washington that the White House is not very pleased with acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee. There is very serious talk in Washington that the President is about to jettison him. This could cause great embarrassment to the administration, but trying to keep him as the head of the FBI could cause even more.

How will they dump him? This is one scenario.

"Mr. Gray, the President wanted me to tell you how pleased he was with the way you handled yourself during the Senate hearings."

"Thank you, Mr. Haldeman, it's been a tough two weeks but I got through it."

"I want you to know the President wasn't the least disturbed when you offered to show the Senators on the committee all the raw files on the Watergate bugging investigation."

"I tried to be as forthright as I could, Mr. Haldeman. I felt the Senate had a right to know everything the White House knew about the case."

"Well said, Gray. The director of the FBI must put candor above everything else. You not only told them a great deal more, and Mr. Nixon admires that in a man. No President wants someone working for him who keeps secrets from the public."

"That's nice of him to say. I heard there were some people in the White House who were disturbed by my testimony."

"Perish the thought, Gray. We all feel you've done a bang-up job. We'd rather have you admit that we had first crack at all the FBI files than have it come out in Jack Anderson's column in a distorted way. The President was just saying to me the other day, 'I wish all the people in my administration would be as frank and honest with Congress as L. Patrick Gray.'"

"You mean he wasn't mad because I called John Dean III, the White House counsel, a liar?"

"How could the President be made about that? If someone in the President's family is lying to the FBI, the President wants to read about it. How else could he run an honest administration?"

"Well, I think it's good to get all those things out in the open. I wanted to make sure the country would know the FBI would have the same independence under me that it had under J. Edgar Hoover. It would be terrible if they thought I was just another political hack who owed his job to the White House."

"You certainly made that point clear with the Senate committee. Say, you never told us you were a naval officer."

"Yessir. I served in the navy for 20 years."

"The President was very pleased to hear that. Gray, we have a job for you that is one of the most important in the world today."

"As director of the FBI I'm at your service."

"This job has nothing to do with the FBI."

"Nothing to do with the FBI?"

"The President wants to put you in charge of clearing all the mines out of the Haiphong harbor. We've checked out thousands of people and you're the only naval officer we know who can do it."

"But what about the FBI?"

"Anybody can be the head of the FBI, Gray, but how many men can the President trust to sweep the mines out of North Vietnam. Will you do it?"

"I . . . I . . . I don't know."

"Good, here's your ticket to Hanoi. Air Force One is leaving in one hour."

"But . . . but what about my Senate confirmation?"

"You don't have to have Senate confirmation to work on a U.S. minesweeper in Haiphong. In fact, anyone who sweeps mines for the President is entitled to full executive privilege."