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Doubts on Mr. Gray

Among the major items on this week's Congressional calendar are the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearings on the nomination of L. Patrick Gray 3d as permanent director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There is no reason to anticipate the committee's eventual recommendation or to form a prior judgment in advance of the accounting Mr. Gray may give of his service as acting director since last May. But there is every reason to urge on the committee the gravest consideration of some disturbing aspects of Mr. Gray's candidacy.

Unlike his only predecessor, J. Edgar Hoover, the acting chief of the F.B.I. has been an open and active political partisan, a political agent of the President who appointed him. The most innocent of his political activities was the election campaigning he did for Mr. Nixon last fall. More serious is the charge that he allowed the bureau's field offices to furnish special information, some of it confidential, for the President's campaign use. And most serious of all was the bureau's failure to press the Watergate scandal to its ultimate reaches.

The F.B.I.'s role in the recent dubious arrest of Les Whitten, the newsman employed by columnist Jack Anderson, is another area the committee should pursue. And so is the even more recent charge, made by Time magazine but denied by the Attorney General, that with Mr. Gray's sanction newspaper reporters' telephones were tapped in order to locate alleged White House leaks.

To his credit, Mr. Gray has opened up the bureau somewhat, admitting a few women and members of minority groups. He has also taken some of the stuffiness out of the most starchy of all Government units, allowing its members a little satorial leeway. But this possible boost to morale can weigh little against the abandoning of that total freedom from political involvement which is the indispensable hallmark of an elite professional police agency.