

Ehrlichman on Gray: Twist Slowly in Wind

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By early March of this year, a month before L. Patrick Gray's nomination as permanent director of the FBI was withdrawn, White House support for Gray had evaporated.

A transcript of a telephone call March 7 or 8 between John D. Ehrlichman and John W. Dean III, President Nixon's former special assistant and former counsel, respectively, makes it clear the two aides had decided to let Gray "twist slowly, slowly in the wind" as his nomination bogged down on Capitol Hill.

The conversation was referred to yesterday by Sen. Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.) during Ehrlichman's third day of testimony before the Senate select Watergate committee. A full transcript has been obtained by The Washington Post.

A summary of a conversation Ehrlichman had with Gray earlier the same day also has been obtained. Both conversations were recorded by Ehrlichman, who gave copies of them to the Senate committee.

At yesterday's hearing, Weicker reminded Ehrlichman that he had said of Gray, when his nomination appeared stalled, that "I think we should let him hang there. Let him twist slowly, slowly in the wind."

Was that what was happening to Gray on April 15, when Ehrlichman said he learned that Gray had destroyed sensitive documents

from the safe of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt? Weicker asked.

Ehrlichman smiled. "He was being investigated, investigated and investigated on April 15," he said.

In the first conversation, Gray told Ehrlichman that "I'm being pushed awfully hard in certain areas" and urged him to tell Dean not to let it be known that he documents from Hunt's safe.

"You have got to tell John Wesley (Dean) to stand very tight in the saddle and be very careful about what he says and to be absolutely certain that he knows in his own mind that he delivered everything he had (all the documents) to the FBI and doesn't make any distinction" between deliveries to the bureau and to Gray.

Shortly afterward, Ehrlichman called Dean.

Excerpts from the Gray-Ehrlichman conversation and a full transcript of the Ehrlichman-Dean call follow:

Gray: . . . "The thing I want to talk to you about is that I'm being pushed awfully hard in certain areas, and I'm not giving an inch, and you know those areas, and I think you have got to tell John Wesley (Dean) to stand very tight in the saddle and be very careful about what he says and to be absolutely certain that he knows in his own mind that he delivered everything he had to the FBI and doesn't make any distinction between . . . but that he delivered everything to the FBI."

Ehrlichman: "Right."

Gray: "And that he delivered it to those agents . . . this is absolutely imperative."

Ehrlichman: "All right."

Gray: "You know I've got a couple of areas up there that I'm hitting hard, and I'm just taking them on the attack."

Ehrlichman: "Ok."

Gray: "I wanted you to know that."

Ehrlichman: "Good. Keep up the good work, my boy. Let me know if I can help."

Gray: "All right. He can help by doing that."

Ehrlichman: "Good. I'll do it."

Immediately following that conversation, Ehrlichman called Dean. A transcript of that call follows.

Dean: "Hello."

Ehrlichman: "Hi. Just had a call from your favorite witness."

Dean: "Which is?"

Ehrlichman: "Patrick J. Gray."

Dean: "Oh, really."

Ehrlichman: "And he says to make sure that old John W. Dean stays very, very firm and steady on his story that he delivered every document to the FBI, and that he does not start making nice distinctions between agents and directors."

Dean: "He's a little worried is he?"

Ehrlichman: "Well, he just does not want there to be any question. He says he's hanging very firm, and there's a lot of probing around."

Dean: "Yea, he's really



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Sam Dash, left, chief counsel for the Senate Watergate committee, talks with John Wilson, attorney for John Ehrlichman, during break in yesterday's hearing.

hanging tough. You ought to read the transcript. He makes me gag."

Ehrlichman: "Really."

Dean: "Oh it's awful, John."

Ehrlichman: "Why did he call me? To cover his tracks?"

Dean: "Yeah, sure. I laid this on him yesterday."

Ehrlichman: "Oh, I see, OK."

Dean: "I laid it on him to, you know, to fuse the issue so I don't have any idea what he said up there today."

Ehrlichman: "I see. It was a funny phone call. Said he is going in to object to the jurisdiction of the group to get into the substance and that their only jurisdiction was to . . . to procedural efforts and his competence, and he says the ACLU put a letter in to the same effect."

Dean: "Yeah. Wally picked up an interesting one on the grapevine today that planned strategy now is to proceed in this one as it did in Kleindienst."

Ehrlichman: "Down to the point of calling you?"

Dean: "Down to the point of calling me."

Ehrlichman: "Let him hang there. Well, I think we ought to let him hang there. Let him twist slowly, slowly in the wind."

Dean: "That's right, and I was in with the boss this morning and that is exactly where he was coming out. He said I'm not sure Gray is smart enough to run the bureau the way he is handling himself."

Ehrlichman: "Well, OK, you're on top of it. Good."