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A Chance for the Senate

by Tom Wicker

Members of Congress are making more noise than they have in years about the need to reassert themselves as a coequal branch of Government with the Presidency and the Supreme Court. It may well be too late for that, but there are a few things Congress could do and one of them would be to insist that President Nixon submit the name of a man of stature and experience as the new director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Patrick Gray, Mr. Nixon's interim appointee, won't do.

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Mr. Gray is not a proper nominee primarily because of his political partisanship. His background includes a long history of Republican party activity, which is why he has had high posts in this Administration - not because of the distinction of his career outside politics. This alone would tend to make his appointment appear political - an appearance sharply enhanced in last year's campaign when he made speeches favorable to the Nixon point of view, and when it was disclosed that 21 F.B.I. field offices in 14 important states were directed to supply information on criminal justice to give Mr. Nixon "maximum support" in his campaign.

Now Judge John J. Sirica, before whom the Watergate case was tried, has bluntly criticized the Department of Justice for failing to investigate completely or properly prosecute the matter. It is, of course, the F.B.I. upon whom the department relies for such investigations, but Judge Sirica has openly expressed the hope that even a Senate committee will do a better job.

It also has been reliably reported that the F.B.I. under Mr. Gray made no real investigation of the political espionage and sabotage activities allegedly planned last year by Donald H. Segretti - who was reported to have close links to the White House. In both these failures, if

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Mr. Gray's political interests were not responsible for poor F.B.I. performance, the public certainly had good reason to think they might have been.

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"Nixon F.B.I. Choice 'Soon'" - NYTimes 8 Feb; story datelined 6 Feb 73.