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Nixon Denies He Backed A Political Role for Gray

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WASHINGTON, March 2 —

President Nixon declared today that any White House attempts to create a political role in the 1972 campaign for L. Patrick Gray 3d, acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, "certainly did not have my support."

The President predicted, in an impromptu news conference, that the Senate would eventually confirm the nomination of Mr. Gray to be the permanent, "nonpartisan" successor to the late J. Edgar Hoover as head of the bureau. [Question 9, Page 12.]

But Mr. Nixon refused to be drawn into a discussion of specific questions raised about Mr. Gray's nomination in hearings of the Senate Judiciary Committee. And the President said he would reject any request that his White House counsel, John W. Dean 3d, testify before the committee. [Question 18]

Touching on a variety of domestic matters in the 32-minute news conference, Mr. Nixon also made the following points:

¶ He remains adamantly opposed to amnesty for draft evaders, not out of "any sense of vengeance" but on the ground that "these men have broken the law." He challenged those in Congress who would grant amnesty to "put it up for a vote" and said he was confident that Senators and Representatives "would overwhelmingly approve my position." [Question 6.]

¶ He still regards his Family Assistance Plan, which he officially abandoned in a message to Congress yesterday, as the best way to reform the welfare system. But he said he had concluded that the Senate would not accept it and had therefore instructed Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, to find a new approach "that will get the votes." [Question 8.]

¶ He ruled out any possibility that rent controls would be re-established, saying it would be preferable to try to keep rents down by assuring an adequate supply of housing. [Question 16.]

¶ In his latest laudatory remarks about John B. Connally, a potential candidate to succeed him in the White House, Mr. Nixon said that he had asked the former Treasury Secretary to hold "informal" talks on energy policy with various world leaders as he traveled privately as a lawyer. [Question 7.]

Unofficial Envoy

The President, seemingly giving free rein to Mr. Connally to serve as an unofficial envoy, said that he had no other missions in mind for the Texan at the moment but that if "semi-public" duties should seem helpful again he could think of "no better man" to undertake them.

There were no references, in either questions or responses, to Vice President Agnew, who is presumed to be a prospective contender for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1976.

Mr. Nixon, responding to lingering questions about the conduct of the last Presidential election, said he was certain that Mr. Gray had no intention of engaging in partisan politics when he made a series of speeches last year.

The President was asked about a memorandum to Mr. Gray last July from Patrick E. O'Donnell, a White House aide who encouraged the acting F.B.I. director to make an appearance in Cleveland because Ohio was "vital" to Mr. Nixon's re-election bid. Democratic Senators have cited the memorandum as a reason to suspect Mr. Gray's involvement in the campaign last year.

Mr. Nixon said, however, that if there had been any attempt to enlist Mr. Gray in a cam-

·paign role, "it certainly didn't have my support and would not have it now."

He said that the bureau director must be nonpartisan and that he was confident the Senate would determine that Mr. Gray had been.

Mr. Nixon emphatically rejected a suggestion by Senator John V. Tunney, Democrat of California, that the Judiciary Committee clear up questions about Mr. Gray's conduct of the investigation of the bugging of the Democrats by examining Mr. Dean, who looked into the Watergate case for the President.

"Of course," Mr. Nixon said, in reply to a question, he would refuse to allow Mr. Dean to testify because, under the doctrine of executive privilege, "no President could ever agree to allow the counsel to the President to go down and testify before a committee."

He added that information, presumably in writing, could be provided to Congressional committees, but he made it clear that he did not intend to permit face-to-face questioning of his aides.

Declines to Reply

The President refused to answer two questions at his news conference.

He said that he should not comment on the recent Watergate bugging trial because two defendants convicted of wiretapping and other violations were preparing legal appeals. [Question 17.]

He refused to discuss Mr. Gray's comments to the Senate committee about Mrs. John N. Mitchell, wife of the former Attorney General, on the ground that it was Mr. Nixon's "practice" to withhold comment "on a hearing while it is in process." [Question 10.]

Mr. Gray testified yesterday that the F.B.I. had not questioned Mrs. Mitchell about the Watergate case because her husband, who is also the former campaign manager for Mr. Nixon, had refused them permission.

In New York, however, Mrs. Mitchell was quoted by United Press International as telling a reporter today that agents could have questioned her. She said that Mr. Gray's account was "the stupidest thing I ever heard."