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DEAN PHONE CALL TO GRAY VERIFIED

Ziegler Says 'Correction' of
Testimony Was Asked

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WASHINGTON, March 26 — The White House acknowledge today that John W. Dean 3d, President Nixon's counsel, had asked L. Patrick Gray 3d, the acting F.B.I. director, to "correct" his allegation that Mr. Dean "probably" lied to Federal agents investigating the Watergate Case.

Mr. Gray made the statement last week before the Senate Judiciary Committee, which is holding hearings on his nomination to become the permanent head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Ronald L. Ziegler, Mr. Nixon's press secretary, told newsmen at the Key Biscayne, Fla., White House that Mr. Dean had telephoned Mr. Gray after hearing reports of his testimony, provided his version of the incident, and asked that Mr. Gray "correct the record with the facts."

Asked whether Mr. Gray had refused to issue a retraction, Mr. Ziegler replied, "I don't know if he did, but the facts are that Mr. Gray did not correct the record."

F.B.I. spokesmen would not comment on whether Mr. Gray intended to correct his remarks but committee aides said they had received no indication that he wished to amend his testimony.

Checking on Office

On Thursday, Mr. Gray testified that three days after Mr. Dean ordered a search of a White House office used by E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former part-time consultant there who pleaded guilty at the Water-gate bugging trial, he told F.B.I. investigators that he was unsure whether Hunt had ever had such an office and would "have to check it out."

Under questioning by Senator Robert C. Byrd, Democrat of West Virginia, Mr. Gray concluded then that Mr. Dean had "probably" lied to the agents on that occasion.

Mr. Ziegler repeated today Mr. Dean's recollection that the agents had asked him whether they could visit Hunt's office, rather than whether he had had one there. Mr. Dean had given this version of the exchange during his call to M. Gray on Thursday, Mr. Ziegler said.

A statement issued by the White House press office shortly after Mr. Gray's testimony called the reference to the remarks questioning Mr. Dean's veracity "reprehensible, unfortunate and unfair," but it did not criticize Mr. Gray directly.

By contrast, Mr. Ziegler noted specifically today that in presenting Mr. Dean's side of the events he was "not being critical" of Mr. Gray.

Not Hesitant

"The President nominated Mr. Gray and stands behind him," he said, and added, "I don't say that, as it was reported the other day, hesitantly. I say that straight out."

"The President supports him fully. But we do not associate ourselves with any statement that suggests that Mr. Dean probably lied."

Mr. Ziegler declined, however, to estimate the prospects for Mr. Gray's nomination being approved by the Judiciary Committee when it reconvenes, probably next week.

The hearings were recessed last week after 11 days of testimony, eight of them devoted to the questioning of Mr. Gray.

Of the committee's 16 members, seven Senators, all Democrats, are said to be opposed to his confirmation and are reportedly attempting to muster from among the Republicans the eight votes necessary to block the nomination from going to the Senate floor.

In response to a question from Senator Byrd, Mr. Gray told the committee last Thursday that he did not know whether it was a violation of Federal law to lie to an F.B.I. agent.

Proviso in Code

However, a section of the United States Code provides that anyone who "willfully endeavors . . . to obstruct, delay or prevent the communication of information" about a possible crime is punishable upon conviction by five years in prison, a \$5,000 fine or both.

A Justice Department spokesman declined comment on whether it was planning any action against Mr. Dean in connection with the statute.