

Bell's New Comment on FBI Chief

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Washington

Attorney general-designate Griffin Bell issued a statement yesterday amplifying on earlier testimony that he would replace FBI Director Clarence Kelley.

"At no time have I stated that Clarence Kelly would be fired as director of the FBI. He is not being fired," Bell's statement said. "I intend to counsel with Mr. Kelley with respect to whomever may be considered for the position of director," he continued. "I do not know when this decision will be made, but it will be orderly and in the best interest of the country and the FBI. I am confident that Mr. Kelley will assist in any transition."

Bell issued the statement during a recess in the Judiciary Committee's fourth day of hearings on his nomination. He refused to answer reporters' questions about the matter.

Bell testified Wednesday that Kelley would be replaced as the FBI director.

"We'll look forward to having a new director of the FBI before too long," he told the committee then. "I can't give you a time frame but it would not be long."

An adviser to Bell described yesterday's statement as an effort to clarify the earlier testimony.

In the statement, Bell took issue only with an interpretation of his testimony as saying that Kelley was being fired.

"Continually referring to Mr. Kelley as being fired is unfair to a man who has given his life to public service," Bell said.

The statement leaves unclear when or if Kelley would be replaced.

Before the hearings began, Bell said he would consider Kelley among others as candidates for the FBI's top job. He has not repeated that assertion either in the testimony or the written statement.

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