

Conversation: 719-12

Date: May 4, 1972

Time: 12:03 pm - 12:22 pm

Location: Oval Office

[The President met with Mr. and Mrs. L. Patrick Gray III]

Nixon: Hello, Mrs. Gray.

Gray: That was a magnificent eulogy.

Mrs. Gray: It was.

Gray: You haven't seen this young lady in a long time.

Nixon: Thank you. She is. She's still young.

Mrs. Gray: Thank you. Thank you, that made my day.

Gray: [*unclear*]

Nixon: Now...

Mrs. Gray: Ah, thank you.

Nixon: We, uh...I think it's very important that we have [*unclear*] building it back up. Ehrlichman was surprised, you know. We've got to keep building up. I think, you know, no matter what [*unclear*] should.

Gray: Oh yes. I think the press has as well, and I think your judgment this morning on your part to bring me there was smart.

Nixon: I think the thing is you play it at this point, obviously, that the key question for you and me to [*unclear*] later. You can say you're one, and you know that the president is going to select the best man for the job and you just are not going to comment on it at this point. As you well know, that could well be what we want to do.

Gray: Right.

Nixon: But we don't have to. We don't want to make you a target at this point, so therefore you've got to give the impression that we're going to [*unclear*]

Gray: That's what we did, Mr. President.

[The White House photographer entered at an unknown time after 12:03 pm]

Photographer: Good morning, Mr. President. [*unclear*]

Mrs. Gray: Thank you.

Gray: [to Mrs. Gray] Honey?

Mrs. Gray: Yeah.

Nixon: Yeah. But I'd say this is what you talked to me about.

[*unclear; probably instructions from the photographer "sit down," "good"*]

Gray: I said I was about one of seventeen—

Nixon: Under consideration. And the president has agreed—You could say, “The president has a number under consideration and that you’re one,” so they know that you’re one, and that you “want to do whatever the president desires.”

Gray: That’s right.

Nixon: And have done.

[*Camera noises; unclear exchange*]

Mrs. Gray: Have they kept me out of this? They better not.

Nixon: Yeah, right.

[*The photographer left at an unknown time before 12:22 pm*]

Gray: What I did yesterday—

Nixon: Yeah?

Gray: —right after I was here, I went and met with the fifteen top officials...

Nixon: Good.

Gray: ...up in Mr. Hoover’s conference room.

Nixon: Right.

Gray: And they were all seated and I stood and I spoke to them [for] about twenty minutes.

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Gray: And I spoke to their sensibilities to have an impact—

Nixon: Right.

Gray: —telling them—

Nixon: Right.

Gray: —what kind of an individual I was, and—

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Gray: —how I intended to operate, and—

Nixon: Um-hmmm.

Gray: —build upon and enrich the legacy of Mr. Hoover, and—

Nixon: How you respect them. You've got to...

Gray: They reacted very well. In fact, Mark Felt called me and he said, "That was a hell of a session yesterday."

Nixon: Good.

Gray: "That was a magnificent job you did."

Nixon: Good.

Gray: He said, "Some of the fellows I talked to who've already retired said, 'With this kind of a guy we can serve.'"

Nixon: That's right.

Gray: Of course, they know you've sounded the fellows that should already want to go.

Nixon: Well, the house cleaning has got to come later because you don't want to mess with it.

Gray: Oh, I know that.

Nixon: But it should not come now because we can't have any flaps about that.

Gray: That would only generate sparks, and we don't want that.

Nixon: If anything else arises, let me know so we can get that out of the way.

Gray: You know I wouldn't do that. Some of these people that you know—This is an area in which I'd like to ask you to give me just some guidance: like one of the newspaper reporters that this morning was pressing on the aspect of my political connections with you and my personal friendship with you—

[*Nixon chuckles*]

Gray: —and I said—I said, “My relationship”—

Nixon: Hoover's been one of my closet public friends. You could say that I explained to you—Say, “Listen, I've always been a friend of the president just as Edgar Hoover was.”

Gray: Exactly.

Nixon: That's a good line.

Gray: When I told them that, I said, “I have respected and admired the president since he was a freshman congressman and I was a freshman law student,” and I said, “If you mean a, by ‘personal friend,’ an intimate of the president, no.”

Nixon: Yeah.

Gray: “But if you mean a close professional friend, working with the president, and admiring and respecting him, yes.”

Nixon: Very good.

Gray: That is the answer I gave him.

Nixon: You could point out that you worked with me in [Admiral Arthur W.] Radford's band, too, back at the NSC [National Security Council]

Gray: I did not want to presume—

Nixon: Yeah.

Gray: —on any personal friendship, because, by and large—

Nixon: If you—You see, if you put it in a personal basis they'll kill us.

Gray: Yeah.

Nixon: And so that I think that is the way to do it. I think you might even say this—

Well, if you could say always like this: “Well, it is common knowledge that Director Hoover was a very close personal friend of the president and his family, which is true.”

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: Point out how I’ve been in his house a dozen times. He’s been, you know, to the White House and to great numbers of occasions I’ve put on through the years. Out of office I had seen him in California. And I’d say that, “My relationship with the president is not like that.” Make it stick. [*Unclear*] “It is not that, it isn’t on that personal basis. But on a professional basis that I’ve seen and worked with him in the National Security Council, and, you know of course, since I’ve come to Justice Department I have a great respect for him. But it’s not the personal relationship that Director Hoover had with him.” You see?

Gray: [*unclear*]

Nixon: That’s a very subtle way. Well, the point is, your first relationship, of course, is [*unclear*] The way to get at it, I think, [*unclear*] is to say that Hoover did have a personal relationship, and you don’t.

Gray: Right

Nixon: Get my point?

Gray: It’s a good comparison.

Nixon: Yeah, and, uh...

Gray: I’ll make that to some of the blokes that I’m seeing this afternoon, and—

Nixon: Yeah.

Gray: —and I’ll be happy to say it.

Nixon: I think I’d just put it that way, that the president told you [that] you might say that “He thought of all the people in public life, [and] that in public life Hoover was his closest personal friend, which is true.” I mean, I know nobody else in public life that I have seen more on a social level than Hoover, and that probably meant William. Besides, nobody in the Cabinet, I mean—Rogers is the closest one I have. I’ve seen Hoover out of office. [*unclear*]

Gray: I know.

Nixon: And I’ve seen him in California. In Florida we’ve been going down there for years, going back twenty-five years. My closest personal friend of all, in public life, I’ve known—much closer, for example, than Eisenhower or any member of the Cabinet...

Gray: But I didn't know that.

Nixon: It was true. Nobody in the Congress knew that, you see? So he was basically a personal friend, in a very close and intimate sense, whereas you can say that relationship is not one you had. It's just the way things have developed. Perhaps mention everything, but anyway—Then you can say, "On the other hand, professionally you've had a respect for many years.

Gray: That comes easy for you.

Nixon: And you can also—you can also put it this way. It's quite—that Edgar Hoover, of course, and the President were on a first name basis. I mean, everybody knew that; which is true, and I was one of the few who was. And the president isn't on a first-name basis with very many people.

Gray: That's right.

Nixon: You can say you're not.

Gray: I'm not. [*laughs*]

Nixon: Well, no, I think it's—those little subtle points have great impact.

Gray: Sure they do. They really do when they're picked up.

Nixon: You've got to remember, they're all [*unclear*]

Gray: Yeah, I'm well aware of that.

Nixon: One or two exceptions, but generally speaking, whenever they say they're enemies of the Bureau, they're enemies of law-and-order, they're enemies of the Administration, they were enemies of Hoover's, blood enemies, and they know it. Boy, they probably practically were irked when I made that eulogy today and also when I made the statement out there when he died. Nevertheless, just consider them as the enemy, but don't let them know that you're considering them that way.

Gray: Oh, no.

Nixon: Hoover was a master at it. He hated the press. Hated them, except for a few that he, you know, people like Dick Berlin and others that he got along with. But he [*unclear*] He said, "They're scum. Scum"

Gray: [*laughs*] Exactly.

Nixon: And, you know, he [*unclear*] And, so you should do the same thing. Never,

never figure that anyone's your friend.

Gray: I know.

Nixon: Just don't do it. That doesn't mean that you don't do things with them socially, but let them think that you're their friend, that you're being taken. But never, never, never do that. That's the best advice I can give. Some of our boys around here have to learn the hard way. They say, "Oh, we can change them."

Gray: No, no.

[*unclear exchange*]

Nixon: But having said that, he played it quite right. Hoover hated 'em, and you've got to keep very good press relations. [*unclear*] because they had enormous respect for the old man, and he was clever as the dickens. With his intimates he'd, you know, he would in private talk very vocally. Publicly, except for the last when he did fall off a bit and he lost his judgment, you know, he got in that silly fight about the Puerto Ricans and the rest, Hoover really never missed. But you do the same thing. Play it, play it. You've got to be a conspirator, you've got to be totally ruthless, you've got to appear to be a nice guy, but underneath you need to be steely tough. You know that, believe me, is the way to run that bureau. And I must say, with the House and the Senate I stuck around. Civil Rights, oh, I would love to [*unclear*] in...you know, all the right answers, and then give 'em to them.

Gray: Yeah.

Nixon: Law and order; repression, I'm against it.

Gray: Right.

Nixon: I think it's horrible [*unclear*] against it. You know, Mr. Hoover was against it. Communism, well that depends.

Gray: I've had to do that. I have been doing it.

Nixon: Trust me on this. Now you're going to be right in the middle of it—

Gray: Right in the vortex of it.

Nixon: Right. But above everything else there will be your friends there. I would suggest one thing that you might do, if you can: If you could have the senior man—which it can't be [Clyde A.] Tolson, obviously, because he—

Gray: No, he's—I've already got his resignation, Mr. President

Nixon: Yeah, yeah.

Gray: He volunteered it. I didn't have to ask.

Nixon: Is he able to [*unclear*]?

Gray: Apparently not, because I wanted to talk with him yesterday and he—

Nixon: He wants to be done with resigning.

Gray: He has resigned.

Nixon: I don't mean—Has he already come in, you know? Let me tell you, this afternoon I would almost speak to the press if I were you. I'd give a walking tour, that's what I would do there. Another thing I would do [is] I would immediately call a meeting of all the offices of the [*unclear*]. Bring 'em in here. Huh?

Gray: Actually—

Nixon: Yeah?

Gray: —special agents in charge.

Nixon: Yeah, all the special agents, the special agents in charge, and bring 'em in. And, as a matter of fact, if they all come in I might pop over.

Gray: We're going to try to set that up next week. I would check with Dwight [Chapin] or Stephen [B. Bull] to see what we can do.

Nixon: Yeah, so we can get some [*unclear*]. Here he is. [*unclear*] your best judgment and so forth. This is not a one-man thing. But, I think if you were to get or one of the [*unclear*] or one of those guys, or tell them, say—Look, I'd just go around shaking [hands]; I'd shake the hands of the little secretaries, and I'd shake the hands of [*unclear*]. You can't cover them all. It's a big outfit, but just so that that building says, "Well, this guy's gonna get along." I'd get back to them quickly. I think that's very important for you, immediately to establish. I don't mean for any area after that.

Gray: No—

Nixon: I'd have nothing to do with the staff.

[*unclear exchange*]

Nixon: But, you get around. You get around get around and shake their hands, and say—You might even say that you've talked to the president. You say he believes what Mr. Hoover had always said that what really made the Bureau was the men and women in

it. That you wanted to come around, and thank them for their work and tell them that you look forward to working with them. [*Unclear*] Just give it—just touch a few, just touch the hands; that’s all you have to do.

Gray: I’m going to do that tomorrow morning. I didn’t schedule anything for today because—

Nixon: No, not the day of the funeral.

Gray: You said so earlier.

Nixon: No, no, no. But tomorrow—Crap, get over there.

Gray: I was interested last night, coming out of the gate. One of the black police officers stopped the car, and reached in the car, and shook my hand. And then he said, “We’re all very proud, all over the department.”

Nixon: Good.

Gray: And this thing—

Nixon: [*unclear*: “It’s an interesting idea that you were in the car”?]

Mrs. Gray: [*laughs*]

Gray: That’s what we are.

Mrs. Gray: Yes.

Gray: You know, I discovered the little [*unclear*, “façade”?]

[*unclear exchange*]

Nixon: Well, basically—I don’t know. We all like to put on the veneer. Like the press; I can’t hardly stand ‘em.

Mrs. Gray: I can’t either.

Nixon: I know that basically they have—they’re not disloyal in the sense of loyalty to anything else, like communism, for instance. But they have no loyalty to the country.

Gray: They have no loyalty to the country.

Nixon: They have nothing to lose.

Mrs. Gray: That’s right. That’s right.

Nixon: They're a bad, bad bunch, but I'd [*unclear*].

Mrs. Gray: No.

Gray: Perhaps, you know, one of the—

Nixon: Like I said, [*unclear*] is just true.

Gray: You know, I pointed it out to [Bee? Mrs. Gray?]

Mrs. Gray: Yeah.

Gray: [to Nixon] The little message that you had in there, I though was beautifully done.

Nixon: About permissiveness?

Gray: Yeah, it was beautifully done.

Mrs. Gray: It was.

Nixon: Stick it to 'em!

Mrs. Gray: Yeah.

Gray: You know, Ron [L. Ziegler, Nixon's Press Secretary] called me yesterday after it was all over. He had [Dan] Rather, and Rather was on my speech down in Orange County. He wanted to know "Why did Gray make that speech?" I [*unclear*]—

Mrs. Gray: On the press.

Gray: Attacking the press, and I told [*unclear*]. I said, "One, I wrote it and two"—

Nixon: That you believed it.

Gray: —"that I believed it." And I felt it and I held it in long enough. I had a factual, a lawyer's factual presentation, in the town of [*unclear*]—

Nixon: Sure.

Gray: That's why—

Nixon: Rather's a son-of-a-bitch. Don't ever see him.

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: Actually, don't ever, ever, ever see him. I can assure you, because he will cut you up. All you do is open your mouth and he gets sixty bucks for every minute he gets somebody on.

Gray: Sure.

Nixon: I would not say anything at all. Cut him off totally. Recognize that Hoover didn't—Hoover hated CBS...

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: ...with a passion, you hear?

Gray: Well, [John W.] Chancellor, too, [*unclear*]. He said, "I don't know"—

Nixon: I know. I do. Chancellor you can get by. Chancellor is so dumb, you can—

Mrs. Gray: [*laughs*]

Nixon: Rather is a smart rat, but not as smart as you. He's more of a pundit, but he's clever. Have nothing to do with CBS, I can assure you. Nobody. Never do it.

Mrs. Gray: [*unclear*]

Nixon: They are out to get the dirt.

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: ABC, Howard Smith, people like that; most of them are in their thirties. Some of them, some of them...not all of them. But, Rather and that bunch, don't see them.

Gray: Bad news.

Mrs. Gray: Oh, no.

Nixon: That reminds me of something. I wouldn't be in the news much.

Gray: I don't want to.

Nixon: I don't think—I wouldn't go on, although they'll want you on the *Today Show*, and they'll want you [*probably directed at Mrs. Gray*] to come along for support.

Mrs. Gray: That's fine.

Nixon: They'll want you on *Meet the Press*. That's just as important. Don't go. I don't think...

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: I don't think that you better sit around, but I would stay away. I would just very quietly do your job, especially when you're coming—

Gray: Sure.

Nixon: —to this point. And we'll see later. There may be a time when you've got to get out and show yourself—

Gray: That's right.

Nixon: I would do it more with formed speeches to the [*unclear*].

Gray: That's the way I prefer to do it.

Nixon: Yeah, and I'd say, "At the present time, I'd like to thank all the press people for coming. I'm so sorry I'm so tied in to the job I can't do it." Don't have a press conference. Don't do it.

Gray: No.

Nixon: Hoover never had any press conferences.

Mrs. Gray: Never.

Gray: [*unclear*] is that all? No, unless you know it's indicated from Ron [Ziegler] or somebody, or John [Ehrlichman], or Bob [Haldeman] should say "You've got to do it on this particular subject or area."

Nixon: You got the message, though.

Gray: I wouldn't do that at all.

Nixon: No, don't worry about it. There's one thing for the memory of Edgar Hoover: Don't do anything for those sons-of-bitches at CBS.

Gray: I won't.

Nixon: They hated him. They maligned him. Another group: *Time-Life*. Never see anybody from *Time-Life*. Never. Never. Never. You may have it in your head to remember, but remember: They're really, really out to get us. Now, on this *Newsweek* is worse, but *Time-Life*, I just, [*unclear*] do something with a dog like [Hugh S.] Sidey. Ack.

Gray: No, no way.

Nixon: They have total, total hatred of the Bureau. The *New York Times*, never let 'em in on this. Of anybody, they got the Pulitzer Prize

[*Unclear exchange*]

Mrs. Gray: That's crazy.

Nixon: I think your best bet is to not do anything.

Mrs. Gray: No.

Nixon: After you do this thing today.

Gray: I've got to do that.

Nixon: You've got to do something so that they don't think you're hiding.

Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: But they're not [*unclear*] here. After that I'd say, "Well, now I'm too busy running the Bureau and I can't do it."

Mrs. Gray: Do I have to talk to that *Time* woman [Bonnie Angelo]?

Gray: If it's with *Time*, yeah. [*unclear*] She's alright.

Nixon: Bonnie Angelo's alright. When I said *Time*, I meant Sidey, Checker [?], people like that. Bonnie Angelo is a nice little girl.

Mrs. Gray: Um-hmmm.

Nixon: It won't come out the way you expect because they did it in New York.

Mrs. Gray: Right [*chuckles*]

Nixon: You can talk to her.

Mrs. Gray: Uh-huh.

Nixon: But I—otherwise I wouldn't want you to—

[*Unclear exchange*]

Nixon: Well...

Mrs. Gray: But, on this reelection, [*unclear*] decided to take [*unclear*] go over and volunteer, or do you feel I should—?

Gray: You already have volunteered.

Mrs. Gray: But I haven't been over there to do anything yet.

Nixon: I'd stay out of it.

Mrs. Gray: Fine, I wanted you to say yes or no.

Nixon: We should get out. I think it's perfectly fine for you to, but don't ever give them targets. Don't—

Mrs. Gray: That's what I was saying—

Nixon: And you can say—And you can say—and I think you can say something on that point. You have the support of the President, and you asked him about it, and he said “No, you shouldn't be in it. The Bureau's got to stay out of politics”—

Mrs. Gray: Good.

Nixon: Just tell them that. That would be very good.

Mrs. Gray: The word will get all around everywhere about what I'm saying.

Nixon: Well, [*unclear*] other examples. You guys wanted to volunteer, you had volunteered and I said, “Get out.” Edgar Hoover, one of his strength's, he never entered partisan politics.

Mrs. Gray: Uh-huh.

Nixon: I want the Bureau totally out of this thing.

Mrs. Gray: Right.

Nixon: Fair enough?

Mrs. Gray: Yes, thank you.

[Departing remarks omitted]

[Mr. and Mrs. Gray left at 12:22 pm]