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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

PRESS CONFERENCE

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Statement of

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

regarding

APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COUNSEL FOR WHITEWATER MATTER

Wednesday, January 12, 1994

6:15 p.m.

Press Room B
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

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AG Reno: I have received a letter from the President's Council asking me to appoint a person independent of the government to pursue all matters concerning the Madison Bank investigation in Arkansas.

As you know, from the beginning I stated my preference to have an independent counsel where appropriate chosen by judges under the independent counsel law to ensure that the person appointed is truly independent. I have also expressed by confidence in the ability of the Justice Department's career prosecutors to conduct a fair, thorough and impartial investigation. However, it is equally clear that we must do everything we can to ensure public confidence in the investigation and to separate fact from speculation as rapidly as possible. The President has so many responsibilities he must be able to focus on the problems that face America. It is important that public confidence be preserved and that the public knows we are doing everything we can. Thus, I do not think we can wait until the independent statute is reenacted. Sometimes we have to go beyond what is generally appropriate simply to ensure people that we have gone the extra mile. That is why I will begin today considering who to appoint as an independent counsel under Justice Department regulations. I hope to do so as soon as possible.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

(MORE)

AG Reno: Yes I thought you would ask that question because I think one of the things you have to consider is the whole picture. As I have said again, as I have said tonight I think it better for Congress to enact the independent counsel statute. That won't happen in time to give the President the opportunity to focus on the issues that face America and he's got to be able to do that.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

AG Reno: I can't answer for that because I have tried to remain independent so far as the investigation is concerned and to make sure that that investigation is conducted in an independent fashion. What I can't address are the issues that the President has to face and the fact that he feels it important that it be resolved as soon as possible, as independently as possible.

I will do everything I can to make sure that the person is as independent as I can possibly ensure, that the transition is as smooth as possible, that the person is respected, impartial, and has a reputation for integrity and --

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, will it be possible for the person that you appoint to also become an independent counsel if law is retroactive?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That will, I think, be determined by what's in the law.

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QUESTION: Will you request that Congress write the law in such a way that this person could become the court-appointed independent --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have to review the legislation to see what would be appropriate.

QUESTION: Do you have a list of possible persons that you're working on now? A short list?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: People have submitted a number of lists, but we will consider everybody possible, to make sure that we select the person who will be fair, impartial and has a reputation for integrity.

QUESTION: As a follow-up, does that include Senator Dole's list?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would want to have everybody's list.

QUESTION: The three-member team in Little Rock that is investigating both Madison Guaranty/Whitewater and David Hale's allegation, in addition to branches of the Justice Department that are reviewing matters relating to Vincent Foster , would your appointment of an independent counsel include those other matters Hale, Foster and ?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I would certainly do

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is talk with the person whom I would appoint, to make sure that the scope of the investigation was sufficient to achieve the purpose that we're trying to secure by asking, or by seeking him.

QUESTION: General Reno, do you still have concerns that it will be difficult to choose someone who is really impartial here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I have said all along, and I would say again tonight, if I knew somebody, through an observation that he made, that that person was not independent of me, that I want to choose somebody in whom I have confidence that they will be independent. They have a reputation for honesty and will deal in terms of.

QUESTION: Will that person be removable by you? And will that person be obligated to furnish a public report at the conclusion of the investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We'll review the terms of the statute now that permits the authorization, and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that that person is not removed. One can never tell what will happen, in terms of their or otherwise, but I think, with problems such as that, that the person I choose might have to.

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QUESTION: Do you have a time line for this announcement and the decision?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, but I think it should be done as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have you talked to the President, or have you talked with anyone in the White House about this? . I would assume the latter.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I have not.

QUESTION: General, this is about the fifth or sixth time that the political officers at the White House have sent you some directions about what you're supposed to do, and they always do it in the name of the President. Haven't you had enough yet of having the Department run from over there?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I haven't gotten any directives from the White House.

QUESTION: If you heard it, what was your reaction to the statement made by Senator Dole today, "The one thing proven here is that the White House is in control of the Attorney General"?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I hope that everybody will understand that one day they say that I'm too independent,

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and the next day they say the White House controls me. The people who know me know that I do what's best, based on the circumstances, and I try to make the best call I can make within the law.

QUESTION: Ms. Attorney General, would you favor the release of all the documents involved in this to the public once the counsel finishes its work?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That would be up to the counsel. I certainly wouldn't comment on that. This is one of the steps to take to ensure independence.

QUESTION: Was there one compelling factor that affected your decision to go forward with this?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There's not one compelling factor. Obviously, there are so many interests involved. One, in any investigation we want to resolve it promptly, and that has been a concern I think, and the fact that it usually takes some time for the enactment of an independent counsel statute, but I, at the same time, did not know what it would say.

You want it done as thoroughly as possible, as promptly as possible, and that is certainly a consideration. And the President is concerned, obviously, because he does

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face so many responsibilities as President of the United States, and he must be able to focus on them.

So all of these matters are taken into consideration, including the fact that the public has got to be assured, not just in substance but in form, that the matter is being handled in as impartial and objective way as possible, and we take all these things into consideration in making the decision.

QUESTION: Can you tell us under which authority, under which regulation, you're going to be appointing the special counsel?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know the number of the regulation, but we'll get it for you.

QUESTION: I would appreciate it.

QUESTION: Can you tell us any more about the possible scope of this investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not want to discuss the scope, because I think that that goes again to the question I can't answer.

QUESTION: Will you divulge eventually what the scope is, once the counsel is named?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, what I'd like to do

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is make sure that as we proceed to the selection of an independent counsel, as much as I can possibly make it, that those statements be. .

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, at your last weekly press conference you indicated that the appointment of a special counsel might even be counterproductive to this investigation, because there's the possibility that person could not carry on after the Congress passes the independent counsel statute, assuming it does.

Is that no longer a concern?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I expressed that concern because one of the things that we want to do is to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible, and we will explore with the independent counsel any condition that might be included in the independent counsel's investigation.

QUESTION: There are calls on Capitol Hill today for a Senate or a congressional select committee to investigate this. Would that create a problem for you, in terms of any criminal investigation going on at the same time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would let the

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independent counsel address that. I would point out that Senator Dole has said if you appointed as special counsel a person with a reputation of integrity and competence, then there will be no second-guessing the special counsel's investigation, and I would agree with that.

QUESTION: Does that mean that the people in the Justice Department who are now investigating the Madison Guaranty situation that touches on some of these issues, will not be allowed to touch on those issues at all?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we will do is review it, and make sure that the investigation is handled appropriately and with the very smoothest transition possible.

MR. STERN: Thank you very much.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: If anybody else has any questions, since I'm not going to be available tomorrow morning, and I don't mean to duck you, fire away.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Do you feel the pressure of the ten Democrats who are pushing for the independent counsel?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know what the White House--

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QUESTION: General, could I ask you one last question? Are you going to resist the Citadel's request to keep Shannon Faulkner from going to school there?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Going to resist the Citadel -- the request --?

QUESTION: The Citadel has asked the Supreme Court to stay Ms. Faulkner's admission to the Citadel, the Chief Justice stayed it until Monday, will your department take a position in opposition to the Citadel, so Ms. Faulkner can go to school?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will check and see what the status is after I leave here this evening.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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