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HEADLINE: WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH
ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
ALSO PRESENT: STEPHEN COLGATE
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL, JUSTICE MANAGEMENT DIVISION

BODY:

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning. Carl has told me that some of you have inquired as to why my hand has been shaking. Over the summer I noticed it shaking and I thought it would go away. But I have now been to the doctor. He tells me that I have Parkinson's disease. This is a disease that, as I understand it, attacks the cells that produce the chemical that controls muscle responses, or most muscle responses.

The cause of the disease is unknown, so my doctor says, but the disease, the symptoms of the disease can be treated by medication. My doctor, Jonathan Pinkus (sp), who is professor and chairman emeritus of the Department of Neurology at Georgetown Medical -- University Medical Center tells me that neither the disease nor the medication should impair my ability to do the job, and I intend to keep on doing it. I've talked to the White House, and they have been very supportive. As I grow old and become a very old lady, I may find limitation in mobility, limitation in muscle responses. But I feel fine now. I continue to take my long walks. I don't feel like I have any impairment. I feel strong and feel like moving ahead.

Q When was the diagnosis made?

ATTY GEN. RENO: About three weeks ago.

Q (Off mike) -- much of your family life, was there a history of this in your family?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm told it is not hereditary, and there's no history of it.

Q In my family there are numerous instances of Parkinson's disease.

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's interesting.

Q It is not hereditary, or -- ?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's what I'm told.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, the -- it can affect -- in some people it can affect both hands. There are tremors in both hands. This has so far affected only the left hand. And that's the only symptom that I have felt. I'm told that it can produce a slowness in gait, dragging of feet, some speech impairment, ability to -- it can ultimately, perhaps, control balance -- I mean, affect balance.

Q Ms. Reno, as I understand it, they've made a number of break-throughs in the last few years on Parkinson's disease. Is there a specific medication that's being prescribed for you, or -- ?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The medication that's being prescribed for me now, and I understand that there are a number of different ones and that they have to be adjusted as the disease progresses, is Sinemet -- S-I-N-E-M-E-T -- with a ratio of 25 to 100.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think that's the ratio of the two different components of

the Sinemet medication.

Q Do you take pills, or do you take -- ?

ATTY GEN. RENO: (I) take pills.

Q (You use it ?) what, once a day, or once a week, or -- ? ATTY GEN. RENO: Three times a day just before meals.

Q Could I ask if you have spoken with Congresswoman Enid Waldholtz about the disappearance of her husband?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I haven't. Q Could you characterize the level of federal effort that's being invested in attempting to find him and in the other aspects of this case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't characterize the extent of the effort. I can say that we have secured a material witness warrant seeking him as a witness material to a grand jury investigation relating to the possible bank fraud schemes involving financial institutions in Washington, DC and Salt Lake City.

Q Can you tell us if anyone else is under scrutiny in this case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment on the investigation other than to refer you to the specific public record.

Q Ms. Reno, have you discussed your diagnosis with the president or with the White House? And what's been your interaction -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not wanted to bother the president because he's obviously had a lot on his mind, but I've wanted them to know and I have told them what the diagnosis was, what the doctor has advised me. And as I indicate, Mr. Panetta was very supportive.

Q Ms. Reno, is this something that you had been concerned about for a long time, when you said people had been asking about your welfare and --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, my hand was shaking this summer and I thought it would go away. I thought it was maybe you-all picking on me. (Laughter.) But it didn't go away, and so I went and had it checked out.

Q Is there any relationship, as far as your doctor told you, between any strain of the job and Parkinson's?

ATTY GEN. RENO: He indicated that there would be no relationship to that. I think from my reading that it can sometimes be -- the symptoms can be exacerbated by stress.

Q But you have made no correlation in your own mind about stress here and your shaking hand?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. One of the things that I noticed is during the Waco hearings I didn't see it shake at all.

Q When the diagnosis was made, is there a way for the physician to determine when you had the disease? ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I don't think so. I noticed it in the late spring. It was so negligible then that I didn't pay any attention to it, but I now can trace it back to then.

Q Ms. Reno, as someone who doesn't -- who sort of avoids going to the doctor unless you really felt sick, I mean --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I try to go to the doctor in a sensible way. If it doesn't go away, I go to the doctor.

Q Are you now eating three square meals a day?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I always eat three square meals a day, and I try to get a good night's sleep, and I'm continuing to do that. And I walked 17 miles -- I'm trying to walk from Georgetown at mile marker zero on the C&O Canal to Cumberland, and so far I've gotten 72 miles. The last walk was this fall, and I made 17 miles, and I hope to make another 20 in the next two or three weeks. So it's a segment-by-segment walk, but you should try it someday if you haven't done it. It's beautiful.

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Q Ever run into the chief justice on the C&O Canal? I understand he's an aficionado of the same walk.

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, but it's interesting, because I put on my floppy old hat and I don't look like an attorney general, and it's fun. But it is such a beautiful walk because you pass by some little towns and some interesting places that time seems to have passed by, and the river assumes so many different characteristics along the way. At some points it's a large bay, and at others it's a fast-flowing narrow river. I think one of the things that people don't realize is that there is so much beautiful wilderness around Washington. So many people come to Washington to see the city and never see the surroundings, whether it be the mountains, the river, and I've enjoyed it.

Q This (is ?) an occasion to consider your overall health, and you probably had a full-fledged physical. How was your overall health?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have a full-fledged physical every year, and each year I've passed with flying colors, according to the doctor. I've done that for the last 10 years.

Q I just want to make sure I understand. You said that the disease wouldn't impair your ability to do the job. Do you have any intention of leaving the job as attorney general because of this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Will this make you rethink coming back for a second term, if there is one?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That would be up to the president, but I'd -- it wouldn't make me rethink it. Obviously, if there were some change, I would be the first person, as I've always told the president, if there is -- if he doesn't think I can do the job or if I didn't think I could do the job, I'd be the first person to tell him. But they've been very supportive. And at this point, based on everything the doctors told me and what I know, there should be no reason why, if the president wanted me to come back in a second term, I wouldn't do so. It has been a -- as I have said before, the opportunity to serve the people in a job like this, to try to address the issues from the point of view of what's best for this country is one of the great opportunities a lawyer can have. Q In respect to the government shutdown, there are some places in the government where there seem to be an awful lot -- an awful large number of employees that consider themselves essential. If you go up on Capitol Hill, there's quite a few people working who haven't gone on furlough. Is there any concern at the department that government employees aren't abiding by the letter of the legal opinion that's been issued with respect to who is essential and who is not?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First of all, I think there is an important word here, and I think it is really important for this country to understand. You come to Washington and you hear about federal employees, or bureaucrats, as people call them, and are they really important.

I can say, from the people that I've seen here in the Department of Justice and in those contacts that I've had with other agencies and places on the Hill, there are so many dedicated men and women doing very important work. I have a special responsibility during my time in office, and when I leave this office, to let the people of the United States know how many dedicated men and women work with them and for them in the Department of Justice.

People have been using this word "essential", and what I've always tried to say is everybody's essential to the long-range correct operation of this department. If they weren't, I wouldn't want them here. But there is particular language, and there was an amendment since the last attorney general's opinion that says there must be a -- the language has -- "all workers whose absence would not imminently threaten the protection of human life and property must be furloughed." So it's the "imminent" protection of human life and property that

is critical. So we have a different category. I consider the employees who are furloughed here essential for the long-range operation of the department, but it is that excepted group that goes to the imminent emergency type situation.

Q Well then, I guess -- my question is, then, is everybody in government following that opinion?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The Office of Legal Counsel issued an opinion, and I trust that everybody is following it. And as time goes by, if the shutdown continues, I think we will constantly have to reevaluate and each agency will have to reevaluate what is necessary because, for example, it may not be necessary to have a mechanic who does preventative maintenance for a day, but you go for a week without the mechanic to do preventative maintenance and you present some real safety questions.

Q Ms. Reno, the American Federation of Government Employees has filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction that will force the government not to keep anybody around who wasn't being paid. What would be the effect if that injunction were granted?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I believe that's being litigated this morning and I think we should let the litigation take its course in court and see just what happens. As I understand it, the issue will become critical when the paychecks actually become due for the work done. So we will see as it unfolds.

Q Ms. Reno, you'll be meeting with Colombian Minister of Defense Esquerro this afternoon. Will you tell us what some of the topics will be, and can we expect more judicial cooperation between the U.S. and Colombia as a result of this meeting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will hope to talk with him about what we have done with the fiscal, Mr. Valdivieso, in terms of trying to cooperate in an appropriate way to see that cartel leaders and drug traffickers are brought to justice and that sentences are secured that fit the crime.

As you know, I've commented before on the excellent working relationship we'd -- we've had with him. And we will look forward -- this being my first opportunity to talk with the defense minister.

Q Have you seen more progress in the way the Colombians are handling the -- I guess, the prosecution?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have said before and I will say again, I have been very impressed with efforts by Mr. Valdivieso to see that traffickers are brought to justice. And I think his track record speaks for itself, but I think it's important that we cooperate together to make sure that the sentences fit the crimes.

Q Washington state Governor Mike Lowry has asked the department to review certain issues involving the investigation and prosecution in the so-called Wenatchee sex ring case. Could you tell us anything about the status of the department's involvement in that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I understand that that is currently -- it was under review, and I had anticipated having it by today, but that is one of the aspects, I think, that has felt the impact of the shutdown.

Q And on one other matter, there's talk of a merger between Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. Would the department have some objections or some concerns about that in terms of antitrust?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not heard that talk. Clearly, we work with others to make sure there is an appropriate review, but what I would do to make sure that our response was accurate is ask Carl to work with the Antitrust Division to properly respond to you.

Q Ms. Reno, you mentioned the Washington state case. What other issues or

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projects you've been working on that are on hold now because of the shutdown?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I asked -- I thought you might ask about that, and I asked to -- for people to give some examples. For example, the FBI National Academy, which is responsible for providing senior law enforcement officials from state, local, and foreign governments with senior management training, is being canceled. The FBI is in the process of sending 260 senior, state and local law enforcement agencies from around the world, and from local governments, (but ?) back home. With respect to collection of amounts owed the United States from civil judgments, fraud assessments, that collection effort has ceased. All types of litigation involving the government is being disrupted, including cases in which we're suing because the government is owed money. We're asking the courts for continuances in civil cases. Where that's not being granted, we're trying to move ahead in order to ensure the protection of property. The flow of funds from the sale of ceased assets, from criminals to state and local enforcement, is being disrupted. When a state or local law enforcement agency assists in a criminal investigation, which results in the forfeiture of assets of a criminal, as in a narcotics or a money laundering case, the bulk of the forfeited assets are turned over to state and local governments. And that, for example, is stopped.

Q Miss Reno, do have any criminal cases then?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have tried -- I mean that's the judgment we made in the department that it was important that the law enforcement capacity continue to be available to ensure the protection of the safety of all Americans. And so the FBI, the Marshals Service, DEA, the Border Patrol are -- and the criminal division in the U.S. Attorney's offices, are continuing to function, to ensure the appropriate prosecution of criminal cases so there would be no dismissal on the grounds of speedy trial.

Q Miss Reno, is it correct that no actual FBI agent or DEA agent, or marshal, has been furloughed, or some actual active agents furloughed? And have you heard of any particular cases then that the investigations have been (inaudible word)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: My understanding -- but I've asked Steve Colgate, the assistant attorney general for the Justice Management Division, to be here with me, to make sure we give you correct information.

The agents have not been furloughed, but the support staff -- STAFF: Steve, do you want? You've got to move your chair up.

MR. COLGATE: All of our street agents are on duty.

There are a few agents who support -- support functions like managing the FOIA operations who would be furloughed during this time period and they are actually agents. But we can say that all of our street agents, both FBI and DEA, and all of our deputy marshals who are supporting the judiciary are on the front lines. But there are just a few instances where we actually have an agent supervising a support operation that is not deemed essential, and that agent because of that supervisory relationship would be furloughed. But we can say for a certainty that those who are enforcing the law in the street are actually on duty.

Q Do you have any sense that because support people aren't furloughed that actual investigation has been disrupted because of --

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I -- my instructions there were to make sure that there was no disruption in investigations. I think what's going to happen if the shutdown continues to run longer, we're going to have to bring in more and more staff to ensure the proper handling of all such investigations. And I have instructed the heads of all components to address that carefully. In addition to the law enforcement agents, there are about 9,600 employees, including immigration inspectors, that are funded through fee collections and that are not subject to furlough.

Q Does that include border patrol?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. The border patrol would not, but the border patrol I include in the law enforcement response.

Q Ms. Reno, overall it's about -- as I understand it it's about 60 percent of government employees considered as essential. Is that -- is that reflected --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Now -- now, understand, because I --

Q I understand the --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I feel very strongly about this. If you walk into this building sometime at nights, there'll be two people -- there'll be you and you and you. But there will also be a lot of dedicated people here working long hours. And there are support staff that are pretty extraordinary and pretty wonderful. And I think one of the things that has hurt me is -- is the sense that -- that somebody might not consider them essential.

I consider them essential. I think that they do a wonderful job for the people of this country, but it's the language of that statute, that imminent danger to safety and property, so --

Q (The Anti-Deficiency Act ?)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's right.

Q Well, let me rephrase it then.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good! (Laughter, cross talk.)

Q As I understand it, about almost 60 percent of federal employees nationwide are still working through this crisis. Is that pretty much a reflection of what's happening at the Justice Department?

ATTY GEN. RENO: About 75 percent are on the job during the shutdown. About 65,000 of them are involved in the functions that are imminently -- are necessary for the imminent protection of life or property, and then about 9,600 are funded through the fee collections, so that there has not been a lapse in appropriation.

Q Ms. Reno, over the last few weeks, there's been a series of allegations that federal prosecutors in Miami may have acting improperly in eliciting testimony against Manuel Antonio Noriega, and reports that your office was looking into that. Is your office looking into that? And where is that investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That matter is being presented in the court. We are working with all concerned to make sure that all the information is presented to the court. I know of no misconduct on the part of any prosecutor at this point, but we're trying to make sure that we're forthright and direct, and rather than litigating it outside, we should litigate it in the court.

Q Ms. Reno, there have been several reports over the past year on the continuing decline in the crime rate. There are more reports yet to come, but based on what you've seen so far, why do you think that crime is going down, especially violent crime? What do you attribute that to?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I attribute it to a number of factors. I think that there have been steps taken. You're seeing the results of steps taken, for example, in New York City, four and five years ago, to authorize the hiring of new police officers. Those new police officers have come to the streets, and they're making a difference.

One of the reasons they're making a difference is because they're deployed, in many instances, as community police officers.

I think community policing, and the efforts of police departments around the country, to work with all concerned, to work with neighborhoods, with citizens, is having a very important impact. I think the efforts of federal agencies to work with state and local officials in our anti-violence initiative has produced a contribution. I think heightened awareness of the importance of intervening in the cycle of domestic violence has had an impact. Ten years ago, people just said, "That's a domestic." And many courts and many police officers did

nothing with it. That is one of our major concerns and major causes of violence.

I think efforts to interrupt -- I think -- for example, what DEA has done with its METs program, which is Mobile Enforcement Team focused on violence generated by drug gangs, has been very effective in taking out violent gangs that contribute so much to violence.

There is much yet to be done, though, I think, as we have seen. I know from my state, one of my most frustrating experiences as a prosecutor was to get an armed robber, get him tried, refuse to plea bargain the case, get a good stiff sentence that fit the crime, and then in the 15 years that I was the prosecutor, turn around and find him out, in 30 percent of the sentence, because we didn't have enough prison cells.

I think the efforts under way in some states to make sure that there are enough prison cells and the monies that will be available in the crime bill are very important in that. I think efforts designed to interrupt the cartel in Colombia are paying off. I think all of us, working together, are making a difference. But as I have told you before in this room, we still have much to do with the problem of youth violence. I've described to you how it's going up so distinctly since 1985. It's begun to level off now, but it's still at rates that are just intolerable, if we reflect on the increase in the number of young people in the next 20 years.

So, I think that we cannot say the problem's solved. We've got to continue to work together in a thoughtful, bipartisan way to get the job done. And I really hope that we can work with Congress to save the crime bill's essential parts of the Violence Against Women Act, 100,000 community police officers on the streets of America.

I've now been to the International Association of Chiefs of Police. I've talked to police officers, line police officers. Everywhere I go, small-town sheriffs, they're telling me it's really making a difference. And I don't think we can turn back from that. I think it's important we support the prevention programs spelled out in the crime act, the drug courts efforts, drug treatment.

We have got to continue to develop education and prevention programs that can protect our young people and keep them from using drugs in the first place. And if we work together, as we have in so many instances -- I was at a meeting of Maryland chiefs of police and sheriffs the other day, and a Republican sheriff -- I don't recall his name -- came up to me and says, "I'm a Republican sheriff, but we sure have enjoyed working with the federal agencies and we sure have -- I want you to know that that one officer can really make a difference for me and I thank you for it." So I think if we work together, we can continue what we've seen start across the country but now focus as well on youth violence.

Q If I could just make a brief follow-up, one of the factors for the increasing crime rate over the past 10 years before it started to go back down again was the prevalence of crack cocaine. Is there evidence now that that crisis has peaked?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think in terms of it -- my understanding of crack at this point is that we have made inroads in terms of preventing use -- new use and preventing people from becoming involved in it, but we still have to make real inroads with respect to the hard-core users of crack. I don't know that the numbers have increased, but we need to do more to reduce the numbers. And we need to focus, as we are with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the FBI, on the movement east of methamphetamine, which has been a real problem in the West. I think it's very important that all state and local law enforcement beware of the fact that this drug seems to be moving east in its usage. It can cause problems. It can generate violence. And we must be very vigilant that we don't think -- let ourselves think that because we've solved one situation,

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we're not going to be faced with others. That's the reason it's again important, and we have tried to work so hard with state and local law enforcement in a comprehensive way to deal with the whole problem rather than just pieces of it.

Q The methamphetamine problem, where do you see the Mexican cartel playing a role? They are key players in that. What is happening to curtail that, since they are really the ones that are responsible for that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Last December, it will be a year ago shortly, I went down and had my first meeting with the new attorney general of Mexico, Mr. Lozano.

He and I have since that time met on four or five occasions.

As I have said before, I am very impressed with the steps that he is trying to take. I obviously can't describe what we're doing, but with appropriate respect for American -- for Mexican sovereignty we're really trying to work together. We're trying to develop a coordinated effort along the border, and I think we can have a real impact.

Q Just one more question on the Waldholtz case. It's getting a lot of ink and a lot of attention on the Hill. Is it a big deal down here?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I never characterize cases as "big deals" or not. I just say we will handle them based on the evidence and the law and do what's right.

Q You're a very popular figure in the president's cabinet. This -- the fact that you've been diagnosed with Parkinson's, do you think that might affect somewhat any kind of political stumping you might be doing for the president -- (inaudible due to cross talk)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have --

Q Have you been asked -- (inaudible due to cross talk)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have tried to make clear from the day I testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee at my confirmation hearing that the attorney general -- and the president shares this feeling -- does not belong in politics. And I'm trying to make sure that what I do addresses the issues that are important to the Department of Justice but that we do not become involved in partisan political campaigning.

STAFF: We have time for just one more question. Rafael?

Q (Off mike) -- the government of Mexico issuing a statement complaining about the latest denial of their extradition -- of the request for extradition by Judge -- (inaudible). They also accuse him of trying to interfere with the decision of the other judge who's handling the case. (Do you share?) that opinion?

STAFF: I'm sorry, I --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Carl, can you -- ? MR. CARL STERN: I'll try to answer it for you downstairs when we go down.

STAFF: We'll take one more question. If not, thank you very much.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you.

END

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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