



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

HON. JANET RENO, UNITED STATES ATTORNEY GENERAL

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9:33 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:33 a.m.)

QUESTION: Good morning.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, by any objective stand, living in the age of the independent counsel, do you think historians are going to look back on this time and say, "What in the heck were they thinking when they got into this"?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think one of the most fascinating issues is to be a part of history and to wonder how history will write it. And it will be interesting to

see. I don't know.

QUESTION: What do you think about the -- (off microphone) -- contemporary history -- (off microphone)?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will leave that up to you all.

QUESTION: What is your reaction to what is being written?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, as you know, for contemporary issues and for what is happening now, I really should not comment. Because the Independent Counsel is meant to be independent. And if I comment, I may impair that independence.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Conference on Community Justice you addressed earlier this week drew almost twice as many people as the Department expected. What is happening here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is one of the most exciting initiatives that I see happening in this country. And it is reflective of a larger phenomena. And that is that communities are rebuilding themselves. I have said on a number of occasions that, up until the Depression, people looked to their community to solve their problems.

With the Depression, people began to look to Washington for solutions. During the War, they gained greater confidence in Washington's ability to deal with the Nation's problems. In the fifties and sixties, they looked to Washington for civil rights enforcement. In the seventies, they began to look to Washington for money for local communities, through LEAA and Model Cities.

In the eighties, Washington began to shift the programs to the States, without the dollars. And the States shifted the programs to communities, without the dollars. And then something exciting happened. And I think it started in the late eighties. Communities, without dollars from Washington, began to join together. And instead of competing for grant dollars, they came together to use the resources they had in a collegial, collaborative way that made such sense. Police and schools and the private sector and parks and recreation specialists worked together.

But what I think communities learned in that process is that the most important thing for any community-building effort is to involve the people, to make sure that the people are involved in identifying the problems that are of biggest

concern to them, and that they participate in establishing priorities and in working out the solutions.

So the community policing initiative has been so important. The comprehensive community program, established in the Office of Justice Programs, has been essential to this effort. But one of the pieces that remains is people say: But what happens when the police arrest somebody? What happens on that child support case? How does it work?

And it is clear that people think their justice system is oftentimes remote, and that the justice system does not know exactly what is going on in their neighborhood. The community justice initiative, I think, is a further reflection of citizens becoming involved, not to interfere with due process, but to let the courts know how a crime or a problem has impacted their community.

And there is an additional feature of community justice. It is a problem-solving type of justice that says, okay, you are responsible, but let's see how we work it out so that you do not do it again, so that the community is involved, through restitution and public service/community service programs, and that we work together to solve the problem so it does not happen again.

There may be quality-of-life problems with the landlord, who will not get the graffiti off the building, will not clear the vacant lot, will not get that abandoned automobile out of the community. You get that done through a community court setting and it can make a big difference. The excitement that was in that room at that community justice conference I think reflects a tremendous energy throughout America in communities throughout America, as people see that they can have a voice, they can make a difference, and that they are involved in solving their problems.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have you made a decision on whether or not to merge the Atlanta and Birmingham bombing investigations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Deputy Attorney General, Eric Holder, is working with everybody to make sure that we are coordinated, that the resources are being used as wisely as possible and that everyone is working together. They are in continuing discussions as to how that can best be done.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is it necessary to put the Atlanta task force in charge of both investigations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is important that Eric work through that

process and make sure that everybody is on board and that it is done in a collegial way.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what do you make of the concerns of the attorneys of the gentlemen, of the Iraqis, who were -- (off microphone) -- deported, that they have not have been able to review the allegations -- (off microphone) --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we have tried to do is to follow the law in this instance. The purpose of the law is to help save the lives of those who provide testimony and to keep dangerous people out of our country. In this instance, the government requested asylum for approximately 6,500 Kurds, and sought to deny asylum to only 25, under the law. Now, in addition, the court in this instance does not act as a rubber stamp. In 11 of those cases, the court disagreed with the government and granted asylum anyway. In the other instances, they determined that they would not grant asylum.

What we have tried to do is to follow the law, to make sure that we take steps consistent with national security, but that appropriate due process for the circumstances be provided.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, when do you expect to make funds available for the National Center for Domestic Preparedness at Fort McLellan, and what amount of funding are you expecting to make?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We hope to make the funds available shortly. It is \$2 million for Fort McLellan, to help train first responders in case of terrorist attacks.

What we are trying to do is to make sure that the legislation passed by Congress is fully implemented, so that State and local law enforcement, who are oftentimes the first to respond to instances which may indicate a terrorist attack, so that they are prepared, and we want to work with the FBI and with State and local law enforcement to make sure that this program is set up the right way and that we are responsive to the needs of State and local law enforcement.

QUESTION: The principal focus of the center will be to train State and local officials?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: To train first responders in case of terrorist attacks. And what I hope is that we can recognize, again, that State and local officials are so important in an instance -- or can be so important in an instance of terrorist attack. Remember, in Oklahoma City, it was an Oklahoma City police officer that

saw the VIN number. It was a trooper who arrested McVeigh. It is very important that we recognize how critical these officials can be in responding quickly and appropriately.

And this is another example of what we are trying to do to prepare ourselves to prevent, wherever possible, terrorist attacks, but to be prepared to respond if it does occur. We want to make sure that we share equipment, expertise, information, and that it is a two-way street; that we have a system in place where we can provide early warnings, and that State and local law enforcement and emergency coordinators can provide information to us that will be helpful.

That partnership, I think, is critical in building preventative efforts and in ensuring appropriate response.

QUESTION: Do you know what branch of the Justice Department will be overseeing it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is likely that the Office of Justice Programs will administer it.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything about the FBI's warning to the Pentagon today? There is a warning that has gone out of some possible threat to their facility in the Pentagon itself.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I would like to do, so that I do not misstate anything, is ask that Bert coordinate with you and the FBI, so that the FBI states whatever is appropriate.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I understand -- (off microphone) -- has been made on the Haley Barbour/RNC campaign finance investigation. Can you tell us whether when you think you might make a decision?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not have any comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, now that you have -- (off microphone) -- discussions on the wiretapping issues with the telecommunications industry, can you give us a progress report on those discussions?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We had a chance to meet in this room last Friday. We had a good, frank discussion with leaders of the industry. And I am hopeful that we can continue the discussions -- they have continued this week -- and that we will be able to report real progress.

QUESTION: The problem is money, I gather. Is there some consideration that Congress would fund more money for this program?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What the Congress has authorized is \$500 million. What is important for us, before we go any further, I think we have reached agreement on what needs to be done under the statute, to continue our current capacity of electronic surveillance. And I would remind everybody that this is electronic surveillance authorized by court order, just as it is authorized today.

One of the most exciting and yet challenging responsibilities that we face is how we keep up with technology, while at the same time making sure that the costs are reasonable. How do we keep up with ever-changing technology that, in the 5 years I have been in office, has produced new challenges, it seems sometimes, like once a month?

It is going to require scientists and lawyers to work together, to say: Can we fix this problem with this piece of equipment? What can be done? And if they are working together, I think they will understand each other's problems. The scientists can begin to understand the constitutional limitations that the lawyer faces, and the lawyer working with the scientists can say: We need this, how can we do this? Well, gosh, that is awfully expensive; can't we do it better this way?

And that is going to require some technical expertise in the Department of Justice and the FBI that we have been building. This, as I have said, is, I think, one of the -- it will be an example of the many issues that law enforcement will face with the ever-expanding technological advances that both give us new, wonderful tools, but at the same time present extraordinary challenges when placed in the hands of the bad guys.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, Barnes & Noble is the target of legal action in Alabama and, I believe, Tennessee, because of books that contain nude pictures of children. Is the Justice Department looking at these cases or is the Justice Department reviewing its own position in regard to this particular type of book?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I cannot comment. I would ask Bert to give you whatever would be appropriate to say.

QUESTION: General Reno, yesterday the administration announced a nominee for the Criminal Division. And of course -- (off microphone) -- that did not -- (off microphone). I was wondering if you and the administration have taken any special steps, working the Hill early or vetting extra carefully, to make sure that

this one goes through okay?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: In each instance, we have tried to present the best-qualified person, working with the Hill. And I feel that Mr. Robinson is very distinguished. He has a background as a U.S. Attorney in Detroit. So many people have said he did such a splendid job. He has been a very excellent lawyer in private practice. And he has been Dean of Wayne State Law School. So he brings a remarkable combination of experience that I think will prepare him well for the challenge that he faces.

QUESTION: When did you first meet him?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I first met him about 4 and a half years ago.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what are the Department's general concerns about the proposed Lockheed Martin merger?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As that matter is pending, I do not think it is appropriate for me to discuss it further. Again, the overarching issue is how we address the issue of competition and ensure competition in this field.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I know you do not like "what ifs," but seeing that it is the fifth anniversary of your term in office here, you are approaching the record for this century, is there something -- anything that occurred in your 5 years that you would have preferred you had done differently? I am thinking particularly, of course, of the independent counsel era, and if there is anything you could have done differently in that. But if you cannot comment on that, any other activities within your stand that you would have done differently.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Obviously, I review Waco on a regular basis. And as I have said on a number of occasions, we will never know what the right thing to do in Waco was, because there were indications that he would have done it 2 weeks later, without any involvement -- or could have done it 2 weeks later. We just do not know. If we had not acted and he had done something similar 2 weeks later, we probably would have been criticized as bitterly for not doing anything. So one never knows what the right answer was.

I think that the Director Freeh has done a wonderful job of ensuring appropriate negotiation skills and a better system for accessing scientists and experts in different types of behavior that could help eliminate how we deal with those situations for the future. And I wish that they had been in place at the time, so that we could have relied on them. I don't know whether they would have made

a difference or not.

Let's see, what else?

I will not comment on the independent counsel except to say that what we have tried to do with respect to the statute is recognize that the statute is there and that we have tried to construe it based on the evidence and the law. And it has been a damned if you do and a damned if you don't situation. And so you just say okay, I cannot worry about what people say about me, I have just got to look at the evidence and the law and make sure that I listen to everyone to make sure that we consider all the appropriate issues and evidence that are pertinent to the decision we have to make.

QUESTION: When you look back on some of the decisions you have made -- (off microphone) -- situations, do you think that -- (off microphone) -- essential that your understanding is that is how it works in the real world has evolved. Do you think that if you were faced with some of those decisions today you would make them exactly the way you did 3 or 4 years ago?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I cannot comment except to say that I made them based on the evidence and the law.

QUESTION: Well, what would have been the best -- I assume you think Waco was the worst moment of your tenure. What was the best moment of your 5 years here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There is not one best moment. The best part of this job is to work with so many dedicated people. I have said it before, but it is worth saying again. The American people are so fortunate to have so many dedicated people working with them and for them, not just in the Justice Department and its law enforcement agencies, but in so many other branches of government that I have had the opportunity to work with.

You have people who have worked for this government and for the people of this Nation for 25 years, and yet they are still here early in the morning, they are here late at night. They have got a lot of wisdom and experience. They work hard. They care. They see you about to make a mistake and they jump in and say: You really should consider this, and: What about this? And they are most always right.

And just the opportunity to work with such good lawyers, good agents, has given me a whole new confidence in the process. Yes, they and all of us make mistakes, but I cannot tell you how exciting it is to sit around this table and to

have five lawyers with five different opinions. They are articulate. The written product is superb. And I have an advantage that most Supreme Court Justices do not have. I can keep the argument going for as long as I want and reschedule things.

The thoughtfulness that goes into it -- these are not just lawyers that give you knee-jerk reactions. They take the evidence, they take the law, and they look at how the law can best be construed to achieve public policy. And it has been a wonderful experience.

Another joy of the job goes back to the issue of community building. As you know, I have said that I came to Washington fearful that I would lose my sense of community. And that has not happened, because I have gained a sense of a lot of other communities. And the energy and the dynamic quality of communities across America, of citizens suddenly sitting up and saying: Hey, I can make a difference.

We had a lady write from upstate New York, saying, I heard you one time on C-SPAN, or something, I think she said. And I thought yes, I can get involved and I have and I am making a difference and you have been responsive. And it really is nice to see people know that they can make a difference in their community.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on the Oregon physician-assisted suicide law, now that you have received a response back from DEA, can you tell us where you are in your review and how soon you expect to have a decision?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I asked that the various components of the Department sit down and discuss it. And I think we will be having a follow-up meeting on it tomorrow.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, yesterday, Chairman Hyde of the House Judiciary, had a hearing on reauthorizing the entire Department, which Congress has not been able to do for I guess 19 years. From a practical point of view, what are the advantages to the Department? Your budget has gone up remarkably, but you are not reauthorized.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As you know, I have not shied away from praising the oversight function of Congress. I have certainly been the subject of congressional oversight, and I find it valuable. I think it is very important to have somebody like Chairman Hyde, who is a man of great goodwill, interested in good government, disagreeing with me on a number of issues, but agreeing on a lot of other issues, to have the chairman and his committee looking at what we do and

asking questions in a thoughtful, constructive way.

And that is what democracy is all about. That is what the check-and-balance system is all about.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, under old business, has the Department decided on a course of action for handling all of these requests for investigation of the independent counsel?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: This is an issue that is critically important to so many people. And it is critically important that we handle these complaints or statements in the right way, making sure that we call them like we see them, that we are attentive to pending matters which the judge may have under consideration, and that we are attentive to our responsibility under the statute.

For that reason, we are reviewing everything, trying to make sure that we make the right decisions, and that we do it consistent with the intent of the statute and that we do not do anything that would interfere with the other proceedings.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if I could go back to the bombings for 1 minute. Why wasn't a Southeast task force formed much earlier than it has been to respond to both the Atlanta and Birmingham bombings?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we try to do when we have an investigation is look at the facts of one, and when links are developed and the circumstances indicate that there should be better coordination or additional coordination, then we try to move in that direction. But we try to take steps consistent with what is at hand and what we know of each investigation at the time.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if I could return to the retrospective of your 5 years of service. Let me ask what issue, to you personally, has been the most frustrating, the issue that still requires the most attention of those things that you have worked on. Let's say, would it be terrorism? Would it be drugs?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not think there is one issue that is more -- you call it frustrating, we call it challenging --

QUESTION: Challenging.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: -- one more so than others. Drugs, clearly, is one of the great challenges. And I think we have made headway. But I think we have got to continue to address the problem that we see of more young people

becoming involved with drugs. And I think the efforts undertaken by General McCaffrey, with Secretary Shalala's leadership, have been so important in developing a prevention program that makes a difference and in developing education programs that can give some alternatives to our young people.

At the same time, one of our great challenges is to make sure that all agencies are working together. And we are constantly trying to improve that coordination, to ensure that we do not have a fragmented, duplicative -- or duplicative approach to drug enforcement in this country.

Terrorism is one of the great priorities of this Department, because this is an issue that is oftentimes peculiarly within Federal responsibility. Last week I talked to you about the development of our information infrastructure, and how interconnected it is. With new technology, we have some extraordinary opportunities, but we also some infrastructure that needs protection.

And so, along with developing the law enforcement mechanisms for preventing terrorism, or responding to it if it occurs, we also have to develop the technology both with respect to terrorism and with respect to regular computer crime that gives us the capacity to respond. And we are in the process of doing that.

I think one of the great challenges -- and I think we are going to have to really continue to focus on that -- is that with cybertools, boundaries become meaningless. And somebody can affect you in this room, being halfway around the world. It is important that we form solid working relationships with countries around the world so that we can identify that hacker that may be intruding into a business and causing problems or that potential threat to our infrastructure that may be halfway around the world, and that we have a working relationship with governments around the world to identify them and to hold them responsible.

Those are going to be some of our challenges. I think it is imperative, in a world that is trying to build a world of trust, that criminals know that there is no safe place to hide, that extradition treaties are used to make sure that the person is tried in the forum where the crime was committed whenever possible, and that people know that the extradition system is going to work to return you to justice and to hold you accountable.

One of the truly great challenges is how you take all 50 States and the Indian tribes and the communities across America and share together as partners in this extraordinary experiment that some really brilliant men undertook a long time ago called Federalism, how we recognize the interests of the States, how we support communities, how we are a partner in all that this Nation is about, rather

than being a top-down, you do this, you do that-type government.

So those are some of the challenges that we face.

QUESTION: (Off microphone) --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you.

To follow up on that -- (off microphone) -- computer crimes. With the different challenges you talk about, they all would seem like enormous tasks -- terrorism, drugs -- (off microphone) -- in these cases, you sort of know basically what the bad guys want to do and how they are going to go about doing it, which is a fairly daunting task to try and get -- (off microphone). But computer crime is an especially kind of an especially challenging, as you say, because you do not necessarily know how these folks are going to do these things.

I mean, the technology and everything is just developing so rapidly, doesn't it seem like an especially enormous task?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is not especially enormous, but it is really challenging. And that is the reason -- and one of the efforts, again, that is so important is that the lawyer work with the scientist to identify what needs to be done.

The other challenging part of it is to make sure that that Constitution that we hold so dear is adhered to and that we do not let technology master the Constitution. That Constitution is, to me, one of the most remarkable documents that humankind ever put together. It has lasted through 200 years of technological advances that we never dreamed of, and I know that it is going to last through this.

But it is important to find lawyers -- and we have some wonderful lawyers in the Department -- who can speak in the technical language of science, speak in the technical language of the law and the Constitution, and work with scientists to achieve the ultimate end of enforcement, pursuant to the Constitution.

It is a fascinating time. It is a time where I encourage young people to become involved in the process. Yes, you can go out and make a lot of money. But you can also contribute to public service, and make sure that the values, the foundation of this government is maintained as we benefit from tremendous

technology.

QUESTION: You will probably say you take it one day at a time, but -- (off microphone) --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am going to be Scarlet until the very end.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you all.

VOICE: Congratulations, and thank you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is really wonderful. You keep me on my toes, too.

(Whereupon, at 10:04 a.m., the press conference concluded.)