



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thursday, June 4, 1998

9:30 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:30 a.m.)

VOICE: Good morning, Ms. Reno.

VOICES: Good morning.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning. How are you.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Department appears to want to have it both ways in this particular brief filed with the Supreme Court this morning. The tone of the brief is negative. However, the brief concludes that if the issue of Secret Service privilege is important, the Court should take it. If the Court does not believe it is that important, it should not take it.

What is the Department's position

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think the document speaks for itself. And I think the matter should be considered in the courts and not the headlines.

QUESTION: Was this something that you were involved in, or did you leave that to the SG shop?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As in all matters, we have consultation and discussion, but I generally let the SG make the determinations with respect to the law.

QUESTION: (Off microphone) What side is Mr. Rashid going to face since he has been arrested in the United States yesterday?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have no comment.

QUESTION: (Off microphone) Mr. Rashid has been sentenced in Greece and why would he face charges for the same crime again.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have no comment.

QUESTION: Yes, Ms. Reno, the Drug Enforcement Agency has pulled its squad out of Tijuana. American agents have complained that they have been harassed by the Federal Judicial Police of Mexico and by the Army. The Mexican Government has said that Americans involved in the Casablanca sting in Mexico would be prosecuted and should be extradited.

Ma'am, this thing has just gotten to be, if I may say so, a debacle. Can you respond to the withdrawal of those DEA agents.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not know what specific you are referring to as a debacle. But with respect to the Casablanca prosecution, I think that is an important step forward with respect to efforts against moneylaundering, and I think that a good job was done.

At the same time, the Mexican Government, and particularly the Attorney General, deserve considerable praise for the great work that they have done in the arrest of Luis and Jesus Anesqua, two major methamphetamine traffickers. So I am not quite sure where you are coming from, because I see good progress on both.

QUESTION: It seems to be an international relations debacle.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would just say that yesterday, two of my representatives met with representatives of the Mexican Government, in Mexico, shared information. Again, the Attorney General's Office in Mexico has taken important steps in arresting five of the

people involved. We shared information with them. And I think we can move on, to continue the very good working relationship.

QUESTION: Ms. Albright was in Caracas, talked to Rosario Greene. Rosario Greene was livid. And Ms. Albright came away from that meeting taking the heat from the Mexicans, and also saying that she had not been informed in any way of this sting. Is this accurate? And were you informed of this sting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on the process of the investigation other than to say that representatives of the State Department had been advised.

I think it is important that we learn from all of this, the need to communicate very clearly and very carefully. And we will continue to try to do that in every way that we can.

At the same time, the steps taken by the Mexican Government and by the Attorney General's Office, by Attorney General Madrozo, in effecting the arrest of the traffickers Anesqua, the efforts along the border. I was very gratified, for example, yesterday, to learn we had a tragic shooting death of a Border Patrol agent, and the Mexican authorities on the other side were extremely cooperative.

I think that this is important that you raise these issues, and instead of labelling everything as a debacle, look at where we go, in trying to build a working relationship.

QUESTION: Is it not true that there is anger on the part of Mexican law enforcement, because stings are not allowed in Mexico, they are not a process that is employed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have heard concern expressed by Mexican authorities as I have talked to them. And what we have tried to do is to say, look, how can we work together, how can we ensure full and accurate communication, while at the same time protecting agents who are engaged in dangerous undercover work? And these are the efforts that one always has to engage in when they are dealing with a complicated undercover investigation. And we will continue to do that. And I look forward to working with the Attorney General, because I think he has done a very good job.

QUESTION: On that same subject, apparently officials in Mexico are said to be trying extradite some of the people who were involved in Operation Casablanca. How would the United States view any sort of move?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not do "what ifs." I conclude, I am sure, that the Mexican Government does not assume guilt until it has thoroughly investigated a matter. And so I think your question is premature.

QUESTION: (Off microphone). I am not asking about guilt. A request from Mexico for extradition of undercover law enforcement people who would have taken part in that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think your jumping ahead. I think the first thing that has to be done before you extradite is to determine whether there is a basis for filing charges and whether charges will be filed.

Again, these agents engaged in very difficult, very dangerous undercover work that was very important in trying to bring an effective effort to bear on moneylaundering in this country. And I think we have got to look at what they have done and figure how both nations, working together, can move forward in the future, communicating together, while at the same time protecting agents who are doing very, very difficult work and very important work. And these are the tensions and the issues that exist in law enforcement.

I think we will face them more and more as the world becomes more international in its impact. And these are the issues we have got to grapple with and focus on.

QUESTION: Are you cooperating with the Mexican Government's investigation of the U. S. agents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on what the whole process of the investigation would be.

QUESTION: General Reno, how are you doing on finding a replacement for Charles Labella, and allowing him to move back to San Diego?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, what we are trying to do is to make sure that Mr. Labella provides a good, orderly transition, that he does not leave until there is a solid transition in place, so that the investigation is not affected in any way.

QUESTION: Has he already named a new task force chief?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are in the process of announcing it soon.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, as a general matter, going back to the Secret Service privilege issue, why is it not a good idea to have this matter before the Supreme Court and dealt with quickly, so that the country can perhaps get beyond this issue?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not talk about it in a general matter. And I think the best way to deal with these issues is when you file a pleading with the Court, let the pleading speak for itself and let the debate or the argument be made in court.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, can we safely assume that the OPR review of complaints against Judge Starr is where it was; that there has been no action from Judge Johnson that would cause the OPR review to begin?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My understanding is that it is still in the same position.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, Terry Nichols will be sentenced today in Denver for his part in the Oklahoma City bombing. With that sentencing expected today, are you now convinced that everyone central to the planning and execution of that incident has been brought to justice?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As far as we know, in terms of evidence, we believe that the people responsible have been brought to justice. But, at the same time, as I have said on any number of occasions, should any new information ever develop, we will pursue it as vigorously as possible.

QUESTION: But you are not now, at this time, pursuing any such evidence?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That is correct.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the E.U.'s antitrust chief Karl Van Meirt is here today to sign a positive comity agreement with the FTC and the Department of Justice. And how is that agreement going to change or improve transatlantic cooperation on antitrust investigations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We will comment more specifically this afternoon. But I think what is so important is that, again, from almost the time I took office, antitrust discussions were underway with the E.U., trying to develop a common understanding and a cooperative working relationship that I think is very important.

As I have said on a number of occasions, as I just made reference to the fact now, so much of our actions, both economic and in law enforcement, crime, the environment, are having international impacts. And I think it is going to be important for all of us to address issues such as antitrust, recognizing its global impact.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

QUESTION: I have another one.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You did not have a second cup of coffee this morning.

QUESTION: I would go back and say that the arrests of the Anesquas is wonderful news.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

QUESTION: You are most deserving.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I am not the one that deserves it.

QUESTION: The Department is.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No. The Mexican Government and the Attorney General's Office, Attorney General Madrozo should be applauded for this undertaking.

QUESTION: Will the Mexican Government be cooperating, from your recent discussions, in the prosecution of those banks that were caught -- I believe, basically, they came running to the U.S. agents, looking for business -- will that be carried on, though, the arrests that were made by the Mexicans and all? Are they going to follow up, basically?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is important that we let the Mexican Government speak with respect to those efforts and the processes that would be underway in Mexico.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, FBI Director Freeh is meeting next week, I believe, with a number of industry people from the software industry to discuss the encryption issue. Can you say what you hope will come out of that meeting, what the Department's plans are for that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I hope, and what we are trying to do with these meetings and with this outreach, is to develop a good line of communication with the private sector. As I have said on a number of occasions, as we deal with the information infrastructure of this Nation -- and by that I mean, to those that are not versed in some of the technology, that is the technology that runs our banks, runs our utilities, runs our transportation system, runs our energy system in many respects -- it has a tremendous impact on every American. Because as you intrude in one system's computers, you may have an impact on a number of systems, on emergency telephone service and the like.

Thus, it is very important that we recognize that there must be a new kind of working relationship between the public and private sector. Because we are all in this together, we have got to take steps together to protect the infrastructure. And one of the issues that we have to face is what we do about encryption.

There is a suspicion on the part of many in the private sector that law enforcement is inflexible and unbending. And what I am trying to say is that everybody has the same goal. We all see the need, if this new information technology is to work, to have privacy in that exchange of information and in that communication. And encryption can be very, very critical

to this achievement of privacy.

At the same time, just as we like privacy in our telephone conversations today, we also, for law enforcement purposes, have a procedure whereby we can go to court and, through detailed constitutional procedures, apply for an order for intercepting that telephone call if we have reason to believe that it is being used to commit a crime or that we can achieve evidence of the commission of a crime.

We want to try to continue that ability of law enforcement, under strict constitutional limitations, to intercept conversations that are part of a criminal activity. And what we want to do is sit down with the private sector on all of these issues, both infrastructure protection and encryption, and say, how can we work together to solve these problems, to provide access, pursuant to court order and to constitutional limitations, while at the same time saying to the businessman who stores his data in a computer, you can encrypt it so that nobody can bust in and take it, you can encrypt your conversations online with the Internet, but we have got to have the continuing ability that we presently have to intercept calls when constitutionally appropriate.

QUESTION: Do you regard this meeting next week as something that is likely to produce something concrete or simply as part of a continuing process?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have been very encouraged, in my meetings with industry, about their desire to work together. And I think, as in so many instances that I have dealt with in Washington, a lot of it has to do with communication. We all get so busy that we sometimes talk in shorthand, and we do not explain just where we are coming from. And I think it is very important that law enforcement reach out and say, let us talk together, let us sit down and try to talk through these very difficult issues.

We are coming into a world where technology is going to present us with the most extraordinary opportunities, but it can also present us with some extraordinary challenges.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, to follow up on this issue, is it still your goal to have Congress enact export controls on encryption keys during this session of Congress?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we are trying to do now is to engage in conversation and see, at the end of those conversations, just where we stand.

QUESTION: Who is in your conversations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are trying to work with everybody, trying to see what the best solutions to this problem are.

QUESTION: General Reno on the Rashid case since it is a purely legal criminal matter, is there any particular reason why you can not speak on it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, as you might be aware -- and certainly your colleagues around the table can tell you -- I try not to comment about pending matters.

QUESTION: If I may be somewhat bold --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Oh, you can certainly be so bold.

QUESTION: -- this is one more shot upon this Secret Service brief. This is obviously a brilliant brief here. But I want to get back to the first question -- a highly disrespectful but brilliant question by my colleague, Mike, here.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Mike is never disrespectful. He has thoughtful, incisive questions.

QUESTION: Here is my thoughtful, incisive question: Since the bottom line on this brief today is that the Supreme Court should use its good judgment in deciding whether to expedite the question on the Secret Service, why did you file a brief at all? Did you think about -- did you talk to Mr. Waxman about not filing? Or does this reflect a deep, internal division on the issue and you could not reach a consensus?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not think I am reading the same piece of paper that you are reading.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And so that there shall be no confusion as to the issue, I refer everyone to the entire document.

QUESTION: Just a quick question. Can I just read this conclusion to you? Have you read this conclusion?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have read the whole document. And one of the things you all tend to do, particularly when you have 30-second sound bites, is just read the conclusion and not the whole document.

QUESTION: Now, Ms. Reno, we did not get the document until about 2 minutes before you came up.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We did not file it until just a couple minutes ago.



QUESTION: The whole document's tone is negative toward Judge Starr's purposes. But the Supreme Court also reads the conclusion. And those of us who follow the Supreme Court know that more often than not it takes the recommendation of a Solicitor General on whether to grant certiorari in a particular case. But there is no recommendation here. It leaves -- after much negative comment, it leaves the Supreme Court hanging.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not think the Supreme Court of the United States is ever left hanging.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, did the Supreme Court ask you all to file this brief?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would refer any matter to the Solicitor General's Office, so that whatever is appropriate for comment, he would make that comment.

QUESTION: Well, you are a party to the case, so you have to file some brief for the Court.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would let the Solicitor General make the comment if it is appropriate.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on assisted suicide, what is happening on your review of that issue, both within the Department and in your communications with the White House on that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We hope to resolve the issue very shortly.

QUESTION: Will you have an announcement on that this month?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I hope so.

QUESTION: Do you have any opinion, or does the Justice Department have any opinion, about Mr. Starr's desire to get the investigation -- move it forward, get it concluded, before -- hopefully before the election -- but get it done as soon as possible?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I have done is try not to comment with respect to the Independent Counsel's handling of the investigation, except as where appropriate.

QUESTION: Is it appropriate to make any comment or observation at all about the fact that Mr. Shaheen has decided to accept a role now in part of the investigation? And is that a decision or a process that you think is a good one?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I think it is important that the Independent Counsel

make staffing decisions and make other decisions with respect to this investigation without my commenting on them. And I think what I have tried to do, and I have tried to be consistent, is, if you have got an independent counsel, let them do it, and do not comment.

QUESTION: Is justice delayed justice denied?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It depends on what "justice delayed" means.

One of the things that we tend to do is make statements like that. And then we have somebody rush to justice. And we sometimes have mistakes made. And so I prefer to say that what everybody should do is pursue an investigation, do as thorough a job as possible as fast as possible based on the evidence and the law.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is there any way the pending tobacco legislation in Congress at the moment would have any effect on the Department of Justice investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on the pending investigation or on what impact other matters would have on it.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ms. Reno.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you. And you do not ask abusive questions. You ask very incisive questions. You all do.

QUESTION: I want to see success in the Mexico drug cooperation; you know that, I think.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Right on.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Ms. Reno.

(Whereupon, at 9:53 a.m., the press conference concluded.)