



**WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
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ATTY GEN. RENO: Hi. Good morning.

Q Hello.

Q Hi.

Q Ms. Reno, has the Department ever made a determination on the legal status of the three soldiers who were abducted in the Balkans? Does the Department consider them kidnap victims or prisoners of war, or have you even looked at the issue?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think I should comment. I think any comment should come from the National Security Council.

(Pause.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Don't go away?

Q Don't go away.

Ms. Reno, can you respond to Dan Burton's letter to you asking that Johnny Chung might be allowed to come testify to his committee? And can you say anything more about how the Chung revelations affect your appointment of a special counsel in the campaign funding issue?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on any matter relating to the pending investigation. With respect to Congressman Burton's letter, we received it yesterday, and we're reviewing it to see what we can do.

Q Speaking of this investigation, should that topic come up in the discussions between President Clinton and the Chinese premier?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Should what topic?

Q The investigation of Chinese spying, basically.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I think any comment should come from the National Security Council and the White House.

Q On Mr. Chung, without any action from the Justice Department, is he free to testify before Burton's committee?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

(Pause.) Can I leave now?

Q No, no, no.

Q No. (Chuckles.) Not until you comment on something.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well ---

Q Ms. Reno, there is, I guess, a conference tomorrow looking at the issue of police investigations in minority communities. Can you give us a sense of what that meeting will be about and what your role will be?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm -- I don't know whether -- the one you refer to specifically tomorrow, but today I'm meeting with groups. And what I want to continue to do is make clear the Justice Department's position. Police are doing some wonderfully effective things in this country, and doing it sensitively and with great, great thought.

I think they've helped bring crime down; I think they have helped build trust in the community.

There is no doubt, however, that there is a feeling amongst a significant number of people in this community of distrust of the police. And the really thoughtful police officers that I know, the police chiefs, realize that for policing to be truly effective, for policing to bring the community together to solve crimes, to

build community spirit, they're going to have to address that feeling on the part of this number of people who don't trust police.

It is wonderful to see that happening. Day before yesterday, I was in Winston-Salem. The police department had established its basic law enforcement training program at a school for at-risk youth. As part of that basic law enforcement training, these police officers were working with young people in the school. It was fascinating to hear from one young man who said, "I didn't trust police. I didn't like police. I turned and walked the other way when I saw them." And he had had difficulties. He said, "When they first started to talking to me I didn't listen to them. I turned away from them. And then I started listening, and they had something to say."

And he was saying this with the police, the five trainees and about five young people who were at the school. It was one of the best experiences that I've had in several months in terms of seeing police and young people relate together. We want to search out what other departments are doing to make sure that we help departments across the nation know what's working and not working in terms of developing trust.

It is not something which you can accomplish overnight, but there are so many dedicated, wonderful police officers who are doing it as those trainees were doing it in Winston-Salem, and it gives me great encouragement.

Q Ms. Reno, the U.S. Customs Service apparently has a very large problem on its hands and that is if you're an African American female and you're getting off a plane through the islands you're more likely to be strip-searched than anyone else. The Customs Service apparently is trying to address this problem now, but what is this department doing to address the whole use of racial profiling, whether you're getting on the plane, getting in your car and driving down the road? It just seems like it's such a massive, widespread problem and nothing is being done to address it.

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have had a number of investigations under way trying to develop evidence that would prove evidence sufficient to charge. In other instances, we have tried to look at what can be done in terms of training, and we are presently engaged in that effort to see, number one, what is the problem, is it happening?

Last week I was in San Diego and had the opportunity to talk with the police chief there, who is developing a program -- and I watched it in action -- whereby a motorcycle officer, an officer on the beat who stops someone is required to put that into his computer which he has with him. And it's easily done; it takes very little time. I don't think it's disruptive of the officer's day. They're not compiling

specific case information, they're compiling numbers to see if there is an unwarranted skewing that would indicate an inappropriate reliance on a racial profile. I think that speaks volumes for what police can do in other ways to, number one, identify the scope of the problem; and number two, to take steps to correct it.

Q Ms. Reno, the police chiefs have indicated, though, that they will resist the idea of compiling such racial data in their arrests. They think it would exacerbate the situation somehow.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'd cite the example of one police chief, and I think what is important for everybody concerned is to look at what is being done, see how it works. If it works, if it's not disruptive, if it doesn't create problems, let's expand it. If it does, then don't.

But it is so very important that we address the feelings of Americans who feel that police officers are stopping them because of race. Let's address it, let's hit it head-on. If police officers say we're not, let's stand behind them, but stand behind them with hard facts. And let's, where we see the problem, do something about it.

Q How much more evidence do you need? The numbers seem to be -- don't seem to be -- the numbers are staggering in terms of the number of people of color who are either pulled over while they're driving or getting on a plane. How much more evidence do you need?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's what we're looking for, because we hear all the anecdotes -- I can't speak to the Customs issue; I'm not familiar with that -- but we hear all the anecdotes, and what we're trying to do is to develop the hard information that can show police agencies what needs to be done in fact, and that can dispel for others, where there is no racial profiling involved, what is actually fact rather than a result of concerns expressed from one person to another who have not been involved. It is one of the more difficult issues that we have to confront.

Every time government exercises its authority, people don't like to be told what to do. They don't like to be pulled over. And police officers do it day in and day out, and do it well.

There are some situations where it's being done incorrectly, and those instances have got to be documented, so that we can have a basis for taking effective action. But in the meantime, we're trying, through training, through the development of standards, to make sure that police officers have a benchmark from which they can operate.

Q But how are you going to document this? How are you going to determine what the facts are? How are you going to count the numbers if the police chiefs don't want to collect the data?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have a police chief in San Diego who is doing that and is collecting the data. And I think we can learn from that experience and see whether it's useful, whether the data is useful, whether the data informs.

And what I'm asking everybody to do is to say: Look, we're all concerned about this. The community that feels that there is unjust profiling, the community that feels that there is a lack of police integrity, the police, who want to do the job and do it well, and who are doing so much for so many communities across the nation -- all of us want to solve the problem. And we've got to figure out what works and what doesn't work in solving it, whether the collection of evidence will be helpful or not. And we've just got to approach it in an objective way, and I think we can't duck this issue. I think it's important that we confront it and understand it.

Q But it doesn't sound like you're holding out hope for any solution any time soon.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Oh, I'd --

Q I mean, if you've got to persuade all these police chiefs --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Oh, wait a minute now. What I'm talking about is what I saw in Winston-Salem the other day. You may dismiss that as "naah, that's just one case." But what we're built on in this country is one situation building to another, somebody learning from what worked in Winston-Salem what can work in another place.

Police chiefs across the country are doing wonderful things in that regard. In Baltimore, through a PAL program, police are working with young people in the community and learning to relate to them and how to talk to them. So much is being done. And what I said earlier was, we've got to identify what's working and exchange that with other police agencies, and identify what doesn't work or what exacerbates the problem and dismiss that.

But a lot is being done, and it's unfair to say that police aren't responding. They're responding in so many positive ways.

Q Ms. Reno, do you think it was right, then, for the chiefs to oppose this -- any effort to collect race-related data?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it's going to be interesting to see what happens for those communities that are collecting the data so that we can make some informed judgments as to what the data can -- how useful it can be.

Q So it's too soon for them to make this --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: They may think -- one of the interesting points and one of the points that makes San Diego, I think, one of the first cities to try it is that they have automated their police patrols so that, as I understand it, most of them have hand-held computers that make it very simple to just input the data in a very unobtrusive way that doesn't disrupt their daily patrol.

Other departments may not have that automation and there may be good reason for not implementing it immediately. The most important thing is not to jump to conclusions about people's motives when they say, "We don't want to do this at this time." You've got to look at each instance, see what can be done, and that's what we're about.

Q Ms. Reno, the Department supported a bill, I think, last year, by Congressman Conyers to conduct a study of traffic stops. Would the Department still be in favor of that kind of legislation?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I think it is very important that we pursue legislation, but make sure that we have the resources to follow up on the legislation and to collect the information that is useful and to do it in a way that people perceive to be fair.

Q Ms. Reno, why it is a department which has given out billions of dollars to police departments, why don't you just say, "If you don't fix the problem, we're not going to give you any more money"?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: One of the points is, How do you fix the problem? And there is no easy answer when you don't know the whole nature of the problem. There will be many police departments that say, "We don't feel we have a problem. The calls, the complaints, are down significantly. We have instituted a number of effective actions, and so citizen complaints have fallen dramatically. We've brought in the community, we've involved community activists, we've reached out to community advocacy groups, and we think we've made a difference."

You can't judge one community by all other examples. You've got to look at what each are doing, see what works, and realize that we have a common goal that nobody can object to. We want good, effective policing that can help make our communities safe.

We want police officers to bring the community together rather than to divide it. We want young people and people who feel disenfranchised to feel that they can participate, that they can be treated with dignity and that their self-respect can be honored, that they won't be stopped because of their race. We want young people to feel that a police officer knows how hard it is to grow up in this country today. And we want that young person to learn to trust police officers. Our common goal is something that nobody can object to. Getting there is more difficult.

Q Do you think it's hard to get the police to trust you after they've demanded that you take your clothes off?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's very hard to get the police to get you to trust the police when you think you've been unfairly treated, whether it be in that instance or any other. I don't think you phrased the question -- I think you said --

Q I can't think of anything more undignified than having to take your clothes off in front of a police officer. And you look around, and there are thousands of people who are now joining these class action suits.

ATTY GEN. RENO: The most important thing is to look again -- it's interesting, because you say there are thousands of people joining class action suits. What we need to do is to get to the actual cases and see what's happening and what we can do to correct it. We can't generalize one case from another. There is no doubt, like there are bad doctors and bad lawyers and bad journalists, there are some bad police officers that do things that you and I find appalling. I have prosecuted police officers. But they were few and far between, because most officers do their jobs under extraordinarily difficult circumstances day in and day out.

And what is important for you to do, because you've got a responsibility here, is, rather than make broad statements about thousands joining class action suits, let's look at the actual fact from community to community, which we're trying to do, and see what is working, what isn't, to address the long-range problem.

Q Ms. Reno, shifting back to China for a second, the notion of espionage is a pretty old one. Is there any sense --

ATTY GEN. RENO: The notion of espionage is what?

Q Is a pretty old one. It's been going on for a long time. The question I have is, is there any sense that Chinese espionage is worse than other countries? Can you put it in some perspective? And can you assure the American people that all is being done to deal with the generic issue of espionage?

ATTY GEN. RENO: This has been one of the priorities for us in the Department of Justice, and I know Director Freeh shares that priority with me. We want to do everything we can to identify those who are guilty of espionage and take appropriate action. When you look at the record, I think the FBI has done an excellent job.

I am obviously not going to comment on what one country is doing and what another country is doing. But I think it is important, and we are trying to pursue every avenue that we can.

Q Is there going to be any contact between the Chinese delegation and anybody from your staff or the FBI during this trip?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know. I don't know whether any is scheduled or not. I'll ask Myron to give whatever he can.

Q Another scandal? Mexico has been rocked by the scandal concerning the governor of Quintana Roo Mario Villanueva. Mr. Madrazo, the attorney general of Mexico, has said that the investigation involves as many as a hundred people. Now Mr. Villanueva, as we know, has left Mexico, has gone to hide, I suppose.

Ma'am, my first question is what is your impression of this particular investigation of Mr. Madrazo? And secondly, is the United States involved with Mexico in any way in this matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I wouldn't comment with respect to any aspect of the investigation. I know generally what I read in the papers about it. I know that Mr. Madrazo has been very committed and very dedicated to pursuing allegations of corruption and wrongdoing. And other than that, I can't comment.

Q Ms. Reno, June 15th is a little over two months away, when the money dries up for Commerce, Justice, State and the federal judiciary. Is there any sign of any movement on Capitol Hill for some kind of compromise over the census issue, that would allow the budgets to be released?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would let others comment on the census issue.

But I think, and I trust, that everybody concerned is dedicated to trying to work out the issues so that there will not be a disruption in funding and so that government can continue.

Q A spokesman for Senator Leahy, who is the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, says -- or on that committee -- says this is politics as usual. He really wasn't all that sanguine about the outlook. We haven't heard from

Senator Hatch. Have you talked to Senator Hatch about this problem to see if --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I have not talked to Senator Hatch about the problem, but we've seen situations in the past where issues with respect to funding created problems and I would just like to hope that we can work through these issues, do it in a thoughtful way, and move on, because there are so many issues to deal with now. This nation is facing this situation in Kosovo; this nation is facing so many different issues that are so important to the American people, and I think we can all come together and get the issues addressed, work through the problems that divide us and get the show on the road.

Q Is there any sign that that's beginning to happen, even though Congress is on spring break?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'm optimistic, and you're not going to make me anything but optimistic.

Q Ms. Reno, have you had the opportunity to review yet the proposal put before you by some of your staff that would have the effect of diminishing the people that could speak with reporters?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I went and looked for it after Jim raised it last week, and found it in my in box. I had not looked at it. I have reviewed it now.

Q And?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: They are not proposing any specific issue. What they suggest is a small meeting, and I'm going to look forward to meeting with them to hear what they have to say.

Q Ms. Reno, will Eric Holder be submitting this week to the House Judiciary Committee some kind of report on how the Independent Counsel Act might be amended, if, indeed, congress decides to reauthorize it?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Yes.

Any other?

Q Ms. Reno, the anniversary of Waco approaches. Do you have any reason to believe that there'll be any more problems this year than there have been in the past?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Again, I trust that we will not see any problem, but we will take appropriate precautions.

Q Did the deal with Libya come out in a way that the United States and Britain do not have to compromise their position? Are you personally happy that this transfer of the two suspects has been accomplished?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that these people be brought to justice, and I think we now have a process in place that that will happen.

Q And basically, back to -- did they -- did the United States have to compromise in any way that you know about?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think what has happened speaks for itself. But I think it -- we have not compromised in our search to make sure that justice was done.

Q What role, if any, will Justice play in that prosecution?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will support and assist the Scottish authorities in every way possible.

Q How?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That will depend on the Scottish authorities.

Q On that subject, Ms. Reno, the FBI said most of the evidence is obviously in Scotland, but some of the evidence is here, and it'll eventually be brought over to the Netherlands. Can you describe that evidence or what type --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. You know I'm not going to describe evidence outside the courtroom.

Q Well --

STAFF: Last questions.

Q There was a letter from Kofi Annan a couple of weeks ago, maybe months ago now, that suggested that the proof at trial would skirt the issue of whether these two men were acting on behalf of the Libyan government. Is that accurate? Is that -- is the evidence going to -- the evidence presented at trial going to avoid that issue of Libyan government culpability?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The evidence will speak for itself and will be introduced in court.

Q A lot of the families expressed disappointment that Mr. Qadhafi is not one of those standing trial or charged at this point. And I'm wondering, did they express that to you? And what's your -- what did you tell them?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I have said on any occasion in connection with this is that we will always continue to pursue this matter, to see that justice is done, and that anyone who can be proven, according to charging standards, to be involved will be appropriately charged.

Q Does that mean that there's -- the investigation continues to determine whether or not Mr. Qadhafi was linked to it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, it just means that if evidence is developed, we will pursue any lead.

Any other questions? Thank you very much.

Q Thank you.