



**WEEKLY BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO U.S.
DEPARTMENT
OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON, D.C. 9:29 A.M. EDT THURSDAY, APRIL 15,
1999**

Q Good morning, Ms. Reno.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning. How are you all?

Q Have you paid your taxes? (Chuckles.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have paid my taxes.

Q (Inaudible.)

Q Ms. Reno, listening to Judge Starr's testimony, part of it was rather wistful, almost as if he had wished you had stuck up for him, during the course of the investigation, when he felt that he was unfairly under attack by the White House and other defenders of the president.

Do you have any regrets about not speaking out more during the course of the investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have said all along, I want to ensure the independence of the independent counsel. And if I speak out one way and then circumstances change and I don't continue to speak out in that way, then people will jump to conclusions. And so I think it is the better part of valor not to speak at all.

Q Starr sort of bitterly said that he knew that if the Carter White House had ever started attacking Paul Curran, he knew that Attorney General Griffin Bell would have put a swift stop to it.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know what the circumstances were then. I think that in this situation, the best way to deal with the independence of the independent

counsel is not to comment.

Q In retrospect, do you feel that he was unfairly attacked at any point?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I would not comment. I would just make the general comment, after having been in prosecution for 21 years, you get criticized a lot.

Q Would you be in favor of an extension of Mr. Starr's tenure past the expiration date of the Special Counsel law?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As you know, I don't do "what ifs."

Q Do you agree with his assessment that he has the jurisdiction to prosecute President Clinton after he leaves office?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q Just to follow up on that question, doesn't the law -- regardless of any specific independent counsel, doesn't the law say that any of them still in business will continue until they've finished up, once the law expires?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's what I understand it to say.

Q Were you surprised at Mr. Starr's stand on the law?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Had you discussed it with him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Why were you not surprised?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I think it's a conclusion that reasonable people can reach.

Q General Reno, on a subject that concerns residents who live in this city, as you know, on Monday the D.C. voting rights lawsuit is to appear before a three-judge panel. I heard there is -- can you confirm that there was a dispute within your

department between the voting rights section of the Civil Rights Division and the Civil Division -- that is, that the voting rights sections of the Civil Rights Division did not want the Justice Department to defend the case and -- but the Civil Division won out on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll ask Myron to give you any information that we can provide on that subject.

Q The last time I was here I asked you a question concerning this lawsuit. I won't go over it again. But you did say you had an open mind if other developments or new information would come about. If the three-judge panel rules in favor of the plaintiffs, the D.C. Corporation Council, saying that voting representation can be done by simple statute, not by constitutional amendment -- that is, if D.C. wins -- will you still appeal the case and defend the case when it goes to the Supreme Court?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have said, I don't do "what ifs." But we certainly, when a decision comes down, review it to see what is the appropriate course of action.

Q Ms. Reno, the department has vigorously resisted the Citizen Protection Act. If it takes effect next week, will it change the way you do business? And how?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are prepared for it to take effect. We have reviewed all the issues, and we will try to do everything we can to comply with the law. We will see what effect it has.

Q What's the nature of your preparations? Have you issued, for instance, new guidelines to --

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have tried to make sure that we understand what the applicable ethical rules are in each jurisdiction. We have convened a conference of our professional responsibility officers. We have made other recommendations that I will ask Myron to provide for you.

Q Ms. Reno, Monday is the fourth anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing. The government's spent billions of dollars in increased -- a number of counter-terrorism programs. How close is the government to preventing another Oklahoma City or something worse?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I have said before, you can't say that you can prevent tragedies like that. But we have tried to do everything we can that is reasonable to prevent it.

Q (Off mike) --

Q I'm sorry. CIA Director Deutch and some others talk about this catastrophic act of terrorism that would destroy not just a building but an entire city. How real a threat is that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think we all have to take appropriate precaution, considering the weapons that now exist and that are available. And that is what we're trying to do.

Q Ms. Reno, may I ask about reports of another terror threat? There have been reports that some churches received some sort of letter, anonymous letter, faxed by Serbian groups, urging people to attack U.S. military bases. How significant a threat is this judged to be?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would let the NSC and the FBI comment appropriately on that.

Q There's another matter, the scale of which rivals the Oklahoma City bombing; this concerns the Kenya embassy in Nairobi. There is quite a bit of legal -- well, let's say there's quite a bit of action on behalf of people killed and injured in that bombing, that is going to be coming against the United States government. Have you -- can you make any comment at all about those matters?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. We will make whatever comment is appropriate as --

Q As it comes?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As it comes.

(Pause.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you all very much. (Laughs.)

Q Ms. Reno, Starr also suggested yesterday that the department had not been fully forthcoming with assistance that he needed, particularly in the last year. Can you say what assistance he requested that you were not fully forthcoming with?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think we've tried to do everything we thought we could consistent with the Independent Counsel Act.

Q Do you know specifically what he's referring to?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I don't.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Why don't you wait and see? (Laughter.)

Q (Off-mike comments and laughter.)

Q Are you going to propose anything specific to deal with police brutality?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We'll see.

Q Ms. Reno, how do you feel, as attorney general or as Ms. Reno, about the jailing of Dr. Kevorkian?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't have any knowledge of the specifics of the case, and I don't think I should comment.

Q Ms. Reno, on the Susan McDougal matter, any thoughts on whether Starr's office should retry the contempt -- (off mike)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, obviously, as independent counsel has jurisdiction of that matter, I don't think I should comment.

Q Ms. Reno, are you hearing any reports of discrimination or any acts of violence against Serbs or against Yugoslav nationalists in this country?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't heard of any such reports. I will ask Myron if he has received anything, but I have not.

Q Ms. Reno, coming back to the COPS program, are the instances of misappropriation of funds and mismanagement that have been documented in Atlanta and Nassau County and several other places -- are they something that just comes with the territory? Are they likely to continue as the program continues, or are they things that you can address in an isolated way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that we pursue any allegation of ineffective or other use -- inappropriate use of monies. I think the COPS program

has been so successful, and I early on asked the inspector general to become involved to make sure that we followed up to ensure the appropriate use of funds. And the COPS office has referred cases to the inspector general to make sure that we do follow up on these matters.

Q Have any of his investigations concluded? Have you received any final reports

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ATTY GEN. RENO: I think they may be issuing the report shortly.

Q In other words, the fact that we know about Atlanta and Nassau County, and 98 other places, is in large part, is probable to the work that the program has done itself, to self-police if you will?

ATTY GEN. RENO: There have been referrals to the Inspector General's Office. I don't know whether they have pursued any specific cases on their own for which they have found mismanagement. But what we have tried to do is make sure that when we see any example, we pursue it.

Q Ms. Reno, the INS believes there are about 5,000 Kosovars here in the United States, and you are extending a temporary protected-status program for those Kosovars. As of earlier this week though, only several hundred of them had applied. Do you have any knowledge that more are taking advantage of it, the program?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know the numbers involved.

(Pause.) Thank you. (Cross talk, laughter.)

Q Have a good day.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you.

Q You are not saying anything about the speech, huh?

ATTY GEN. RENO (?): No.

Q Thank you.

Q Anyway, all right. Thank you, Ms. Reno.

END.