



WEEKLY MEDIA BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Hi.

Q Ms. Reno, several names are being bandied about as

successors to Judge Starr to complete the Whitewater investigation. Some of them, such as Hickman Ewing and Mike Emmick, are fairly controversial. Does the department have any input into this process? Are you filing anything with the Special Division? Or is it simply up to the Special Division to pick a successor?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q Ms. Reno, the investigations are starting to add up in Congress. We've got a Waco, got Hatch trying to release your testimony on the Wen Ho Lee situation; now, we have got Fred Thompson looking into the Charlie Trie investigation.

Are these legitimate oversights, or are the Republicans simply trying to get stuff on you?

Q Well, I am happy for anybody to review what I have done. And I always welcome the opportunity to talk with them and to answer questions in a thoughtful way. I assume that all of this is in the exercise of an appropriate oversight function.

Q Well, you'd assume that. What do you think, though, of this revival of the investigative frenzy on Capitol Hill?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I just -- I always assume the best of people.

Q (Chuckles.) Also, a lot of these people --

Q That's unusual -- (inaudible) -- (laughter) -- isn't it?

Q -- a lot of these hearings, particularly the Thompson hearing last week, the one that had FBI agents, and several of these investigations -- (inaudible) -- have gotten the FBI against the main Justice. Are the Republicans taking advantage of that natural rivalry?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I do hope that they would not. And I again assume that they are not.

Anybody who has been involved in law enforcement knows that agents and detectives are eager and want to do their job; prosecutors want to their job. Prosecutors want to make sure that the case stands up, as do agents. And sometimes they get into arguments.

But I have been looking at all your reports about how we are fighting, and I just don't see it. I see what, as I have told you before, is the best possible circumstance; an FBI director that I trust, trust to speak out on what he believes to be right and tell me things as he sees it. We may disagree, but I know that I can count on him to give me the best advice he can.

Q Ms. Reno?

Go ahead, Beverly.

Q Surely you are concerned though, with the stories that have been out there in the last couple weeks. It's not just us manufacturing stuff. I mean, there is so much out there about dissension, not just between the FBI and prosecutors, but between the White House and the FBI. This has to have a detrimental effect on public perceptions of the government and of the justice system?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think from -- I must say that it's a lot easier to prosecute and to handle matters like this when you are not in the scrutiny of the whole nation. But I think that it is important, as you know, for the press to be able to report.

I do think that sources love to run to you all, and you all like to cultivate your sources, and sometimes you hear echoes of yourself.

Q But, Ms. Reno, if I could just follow that up real quick, in one case this is actually the president who has been making comments about the FBI. It's not exactly a "source." I mean, is there a reason --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I am just -- I am talking about -- I can't comment on the president's statements, but I am talking about how -- what I believe to be the working relationship between the FBI and the Department of Justice. You don't want a Department of Justice that rubber-stamps everything the FBI does, and you don't want an FBI that agrees 100 percent with the prosecutors. You want a healthy tension of people who are able to frankly and candidly express their opinion of the evidence and the law, and that's what I think we've got. That we're perfect? No, we're not perfect. And Director Freeh and I are constantly looking at ways we can -- steps we can take to improve the agency and the department.

Q Ms. Reno, how would you assess, at this point, the Justice Department relationship with the Congress, particularly the Republicans?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I, again, assume that Congress is exercising its oversight function, and that the Justice Department is the department responsible for a number of issues that are of major concern to this country and that Congress is exercising its oversight function. It gets upset with us sometimes, we get upset with them, because we each have our own responsibility. And it is important that we try to recognize each other's responsibility, not assign bad motives unless we can really demonstrate them, and work together to accomplish what we set out to do for the nation.

Q Just a quick follow-up. You heard many of the complaints before about campaign finance. But you had Senator Thompson and Senator Hatch making various comments in recent weeks. Has your perception of how they view you changed at all?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't deal in perceptions of how people view me, I take people at face value when I talk to them face to face. I don't take their comments on Sunday mornings that people relay to me, I take my dealings with them, and when they say something to me, I take it at face value until I'm proven wrong.

And when I go to meet them, I take them at face value.

And using the two people that you've talked about, Senators Thompson and Hatch, I think we have had a very straightforward communication.

(Cross talk.)

Q I'm sorry.

Q Go ahead.

Q Ms. Reno, I know that you've talked about the campaign finance probe in the past, but --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Could you speak up a little bit, please?

Q I'm sorry. I know you've spoken about the campaign finance probe that the task force is doing, in the past. But today what is your assessment of the job that they've done and the progress of that task force? And how closely are you involved in monitoring what they're doing? And do you feel fully satisfied with what they've done so far?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I meet regularly with them and am brought up to date on new developments with respect to the cases. I think they've done an excellent job. I will ask, so that I don't overstate or understate the figures, the number of cases that they have resolved. And I'm, again, proud of what they do under such a public spotlight. It is very difficult to prosecute, to make the -- take the steps that are important in prosecution when everybody's looking at you and your prosecution is taking place in the papers, as opposed to doing it the right way, without letting everybody know what's happening.

Q But one of the chief criticisms, as I understand it, is that there have been a lot of plea agreements, and you can point to a large number of people who have, you know, pleaded guilty, but they don't seem to get prison time. They don't seem to add up to -- it doesn't seem like there's a case that's building that leads to people who

were not just contributors but people who received the money. I think that's the criticism. Maybe I'm wrong. And what's your view of that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The criticism would be appropriate if the person who was criticizing said, "This plea agreement is wrong for the following reason, and the case should have been charged as such because additional evidence is available. And this person should have been charged, and he wasn't charged, and something must be wrong."

I would have to try to respond, if I could, if the matter wasn't pending.

But to say that something is wrong without saying what the alternative is, or without saying why it's wrong, is again one of the concerns I have about people who are critical of the criminal justice system.

If you do the criminal justice system the right way, you respond based on the evidence and the law. You don't say that, because there is political pressure or because the public focuses on this, that you create charges that don't exist in the evidence.

And what we've tried to do is take the evidence and make the correct charge, based on the law. We're going to continue to try to do that in every way that we can.

Q Ms. Reno, I understand that there's been another delay regarding the Miranda case. I'm just curious why there's been such a delay with such an important tool for prosecutors.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Which is the Miranda case that you're referring to?

Q The Miranda case --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Are you referring to the Dickerson (sp) case?

Q Yes.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not sure of what the delay is, but if -- I think the solicitor general may have asked for additional time. You might check with that office.

Q Because that's -- I understand there's a second -- been a second extension granted now.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Mm-hmm. (Affirmative.)

Q I'm just curious why, why the department would need so much time in this matter.

ATTY GEN. RENO: The solicitor general has a schedule this fall that's pretty daunting, and I think you should check with him to make sure that whatever comment is made is made based on his understanding.

Q Speaking of Dickerson (sp), will the department defend the -- I believe it was the '67 law that sought to repeal Miranda?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will let the solicitor general speak as he should, and we won't discuss it in the papers.

Q Ms. Reno, Viktor Chernomyrdin is in the United States. In fact, he's in town, speaking today at the Press Club at noon. He says that money laundering and corruption charges have poisoned relations between the United States and his country, Russia. And I would just ask if you have any comment about that. Is there clearly grounds for the investigations that are going on into New York Bank (sic) and such? And then I have a follow-up.

ATTY GEN. RENO: What's your follow-up?

Q Okay. (Laughter.) The follow-up is that the CIA, back in nineteen hundred and -- I believe it was '95, had a report out that Mr. Chernomyrdin was financially corrupt, and this was rejected by the Clinton-Gore administration. And so are we listening to a man who is spreading lies and trying to

stifle investigations, or does he have a legitimate concern about U.S. relations?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on any reports of the CIA or otherwise.

Q Understood. But what about what Mr. Chernomyrdin is saying, to cool it on the corruption and money-laundering, is that going to affect anybody in Justice as far as investigation is concerned?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're going to continue any investigation that we have, but I will not comment on any specifics.

Q As long as we're on a "no comment" track -- (laughter) --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Why not be optimistic? (Scattered laughter.)

Q -- and relations with Congress, what about the investigation into Haley Barbour, the campaign finance investigation; has that been resolved?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment.

Q How about the investigation into Chairman Dan Burton on the same matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I won't comment.

Q Ms. Reno, given the recent allegations coming out of Los Angeles concerning a gang unit -- are you aware of that particular case, in which the officer apparently admitted that he and other officers shot a suspect and then framed the suspect for a crime?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm just aware of the general allegations.

Q How concerned are you about the Los Angeles Police Department? The Justice Department currently has a pattern and practice probe into allegations of excessive force. Are you monitoring that situation closely?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important, again, not to jump to conclusions and to let the processes take the appropriate course. There is -- one of the frustrations I have is that there are so many good police officers in the Los Angeles Police Department, in other departments, that put their lives on the line for us, that work with the community, that develop trust in the community, and it is important that we don't prejudge a matter or prejudge an investigation. And it's also important that we recognize and respect and support the officers who are trying to do their job.

So I would not comment on any pending matter. I monitor the pattern and practice review, and I want to try to figure out everything that we can do, in the time we have remaining in the Department of Justice, to support good policing, honest policing, which is the majority of policing in this country, and hold others accountable.

Q Ms. Reno, if as you say, the accounts of the tension between the Justice Department and the FBI are wrong, how would you characterize the relationship between the two departments? And provide us some -- your take on Director Freeh's leadership.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think I have addressed it, but I will be delighted to address it again. And I appreciate the opportunity.

I think, if you have a prosecutor and an investigator, you want them to be able to speak candidly and freely with each other. You will expect disagreement because, if the prosecutor said that the investigator did everything right and rubber-stamped it and said, "We agree a hundred percent," then you all would be saying that the Justice Department was the handmaiden of the FBI, and that wouldn't be a good thing. If the Justice Department was at odds on every case with the FBI, that wouldn't be a good thing.

What you want is good frank, open discussion, and that's what I think we have. We go back and forth. We go over

there and talk. We talk about so many different issues; from encryption that we have dealt with together, how we prepare the FBI for the age of cybercrime, how we deal with international issues, how we put together a massive investigation and prosecution in Oklahoma City, how we address the issue of the Unabomber, how we focus on hate crimes, how we prepare for terrorism. We cover so many extraordinarily complex issues, and sometimes we disagree. But we have worked together, under very difficult circumstances, in a way that I find it -- I have been very happy with it.

Now, that is not to say that we are perfect. And when Director Freeh has some thoughts about how I can improve, I try to address them. And when I have suggestions as to how the FBI can try to improve, they try to address them. And if that's wrong, then I'd sure like to know what's right.

Q Ms. Reno, it's fine to have disagreements, but don't these things tend to be done behind closed doors? Doesn't it -- having these disagreements in the open basically -- well, maybe it's a source here, a source there, but they're basically leaking the information. Doesn't that then undercut confidence in the Justice Department or in the FBI? I mean the public looks at this and they say, "Boy, is the FBI not doing what they're supposed to doing, or is the FBI pushing too far?" I mean, shouldn't these things -- it's fine to have disagreements, but do it behind closed doors where it doesn't undermine your authority or the FBI's integrity?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, you've got the extraordinarily wonderful balance between the free press and doing things behind closed doors. Sure, I'd like -- much prefer to have disagreements behind closed doors. But I am proud to say and proud to talk about an agency that does such an extraordinary job for this country, that has dealt with just so many different cases and so many complicated problems.

I mean, I still come back to going to Oklahoma City in those days immediately after the bombing, and watching as those agents pulled together, piece by piece, an

extraordinary effort in cooperation with state and local officials that were absolutely essential to the effort as well. I remember standing there at 2:00 in the morning as they came home from East Africa at Andrews Air Force Base, and what they had done in terms of putting together cases half way around the world under the most difficult circumstances. I see FBI agents with kids, and the kids just look up to them; they can't figure out why they have a wire in their ear, and then when they figure that they're FBI, they want to talk to them, they're so proud of them. It is a great agency with tremendous responsibilities. And if there is disagreement, I am proud to say that I can take that in the open. But I'd be very unhappy if we agreed all the time.

Q Ms. Reno, but do you --

Q Ms. Reno?

ATTY GEN. RENO: She gets a chance now. You had two questions.

Q I feel like you didn't fully answer my question. I thought I'd follow up.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well --

Q I mean, my question is, do you -- that's fine that you can take it, but do you think that it undermines confidence, public confidence, in either the Department of Justice -- I mean, when you have two agencies bickering that are supposed to be working together, it makes you wonder, well, is there a cover-up, or are these guys pushing too hard?

Do you think it undermines confidence?

ATTY GEN. RENO: If you think there's a cover-up after all you- all have reported, I -- (Scattered laughter.)

Q Do you think it undermines confidence?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think you -- I don't think public disagreement undermines confidence, if it's presented in the right way. If you present it -- what does undermine confidence is "Freeh and Reno in another fight" headline.

Q Well, that is the right way to do it.

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, I don't think you all do it the right way. That's what I've been trying to say.

Q (Off mike.) (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've been trying to say you pick fights.

Q Well, I'm saying -- if you're saying, "If it's done the right way," has the FBI been doing it in the right way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: The FBI disagrees with me at times. In most of the cases, we agree. We work together to resolve problems. And I think that's the right way to do it.

Q Ms. Reno, a lot of what you call "disagreements," though, that have been publicized, have been agents impugning motives of prosecutors. It's not just professional disagreement about whether probable cause exists. It's agents deliberately, in their congressional testimony --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Show me the congressional testimony.

Q Well, it was before Senator Thompson last year -- four FBI agents --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Show me the congressional testimony.

Q -- where they impugn the motives of the prosecutors, where they write letters saying that the --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Show me the --

Q I'll be happy to.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good.

Q (Laughs.)

Q Are you saying that you have not seen any such testimony?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have heard a different version. So let us look at the testimony of who --

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: What did they say? What precisely did they say?

Q What's the different version that you've heard? You said, "I've heard a different version." What is that version you've heard?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That there was a disagreement. What I would like to know is exactly what you think they said that impugned motives, because it is very important that we listen carefully, that we understand that -- look, this is a hard enough job without having to deal with extraneous things, such as did this person do this? Let's look at facts, as we have them, and make the best judgment.

Q Ms. Reno, there was a suggestion by an FBI agent that there were nefarious reasons for the disappearance of 27 pages of her notes. That was very strongly stated.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, why don't you get the transcript? You know exactly where I am.

I walk by your office ever night. Sometimes you are gone; oftentimes you are there. And I will take a look at.

(Laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno?

ATTY GEN. RENO: And I won't avoid your -- walking past your

office.

Q Ms. Reno, can we take another --

Q When did the OPR begins its investigation of those missing notes?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'll ask Myron -- or Myron isn't here. I'll ask Carol to give you the best version.

Q Well, I mean, was it recent, since this arose on Capitol Hill?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to --

Q Carol.

ATTY GEN. RENO: -- or Carol -- I do not know the specific date it was opened. And if I were to guess, I wouldn't want to be inaccurate. And I want to make sure that I can give you as accurate as information as possible.

Q Ms. Reno?

Q Are you saying that -- (inaudible) -- the FBI and main Justice is a healthy rivalry? Is that --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I don't think it's a rivalry. I think there are two agencies trying to do their level best for the American people. I think there is disagreement. And if there wasn't disagreement, the American people should be very suspicious of the arrangement.

Q Is it like local police and local prosecutors in cities around the country?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's better than local police and local prosecutors in situations that I have seen, because I can walk across the street, sit down, and say: "How are we going to handle this? What are we going to do? How can we work this one out?" And they will have views; I will have views. Most of the time we will agree.

But I don't call that a rivalry. I call this trying to figure out how to solve the problems of law enforcement, how to bring justice in this country. And if everybody agreed on that, it -- (pauses) --

Q Ms. Reno --

ATTY GEN. RENO: -- I just look at you all. And now let me give you an example.

Do you always agree with your city editor? Are you --

Q (Inaudible.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: -- okay. And when you disagree with your city editor, I don't think it's a rivalry.

Q It can be. (Laughs.) (Laughter.)

Q (Inaudible) -- that story -- (inaudible) -- on the wire --

Q Ms. Reno?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, there are -- I can tell you that everybody in the -- because you don't think it's newsworthy and you don't think it will embarrass him. But I think, if you enter in disagreement with your city editor, knowing city editors that I have known and reporters that I have known, it's: "The blank-blank-blank city editor of humpf-humpf. How could he do that? What did he mean by doing this? Humpf-humpf-humpf-humpf." And everybody in the city room knows.

But you aren't as subject to scrutiny.

Q Ms. Reno, on a slightly different subject, there's seems to be quite a bit of difference of opinion between -- and dissent between leaders of the Congress and the department. But you had, specifically, Orrin Hatch, regarding the FALN

clemency matter, this week said, I quote, "Justice did not follow its own rules and guidelines, it did not follow its own U.S. Attorneys' manual." Do you have some comment or retort to that particular -- that's coming from Senator Hatch.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Eric Holder, the deputy, is going to be testifying, and I think that consistent with the claim of executive privilege, those matters will be addressed at the hearing.

Q Ms. Reno, can you comment on whether you've come to a decision regarding this Saudi citizen who was here and had a connection, some sort of connection to the Khobar Towers bombing? Have you decided yet whether it would be appropriate to deport him?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment at this time.

Q Can you comment at all on the parameters, where this stands? Are you close to a decision or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I cannot comment at this time.

Q Ms. Reno, on the Wen Ho Lee investigation, can you give us any sense of how that expanded investigation is going, what kind of staffing is -- how you're staffing it? And also, what the relationship is between that investigation and the other oversight investigation that you had launched earlier into how the FBI had handled this investigation in the first place?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment on any matter with respect to the pending investigation. The review that we are working on is proceeding, and I expect a report in the near future.

Q That's the Bellows report?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes.

Q How near in the future --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not sure. I don't want to put a time limit on them. I obviously would like to have it as soon as possible, consistent with a thorough investigation. So I am hopeful that they will do whatever is necessary to ensure thoroughness and that we will have the benefit of it as soon as possible.

Q How could you have a report on that review out before the actual investigation on the same subject matter has been resolved in some form or another?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I've asked that be done is that there be a review of how the investigation was conducted up until the time of the hearings.

Q But wouldn't that have a direct impact on the actual investigation itself?

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the things that we have tried to do is to make sure that the information provided to me did not in any way interfere with the criminal investigation.

Q Would that be a public report?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It may not be a public report, for that reason.

Q Ms. Reno, I want to read you something from -- this is a memo that is from an FBI agent, Ivian Smith, to Director Freeh. And he's talking about his concerns with the campaign finance probe. Because you said "Please tell me the transcript."

ATTY GEN. RENO: Mm-hm. (Acknowledgement.)

Q I'm going to read this to you, and then I'd like you to tell me if you feel that this falls under the rubric of what you consider a healthy disagreement. And I'm quoting from his memo. "I am well aware of such matters as prosecutive discretion, but I am convinced the team at DOJ leading this investigation is, at best, simply not up to

the task. Frankly, I base this conclusion not only on the CAMPCON matter but other investigations Public Integrity has handled from their office due to recusals from the United States attorneys. The impression left is the emphasis is on how not to prosecute matters, not how to aggressively conduct investigations leading to prosecutions."

ATTY GEN. RENO: What is your question?

Q How does that sound to you? You said that I feel that all of these disagreements in what these four agents said in the congressional testimony was a healthy disagreement, it wasn't --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have asked --

Q -- impugning motives.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have asked if -- I'm aware of that memo. What I would like to know is exactly what was said at -- I don't take that as impugning people's motives; I take that as an investigator who wants to charge full steam ahead and prosecutors who want to make sure that they've got a case and that the case stands up on appeal. And if there are further impugnings of motives, I'd like to look at them. But the important thing is -- and I'll get the transcript myself and see just exactly what was said.

Q Ms. Reno, on the Waco investigation, Senator Danforth has said he cannot operate properly if all sorts of other investigators are questioning his witnesses first. What's your feeling about congressional investigators investigating at the same time as the Danforth investigation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That is a matter that Senator Danforth should address.

Q Well, if I can ask a related question, with the Specter task force that's being set up for Waco and Chinese espionage/campaign finance, do you personally take an

investigation like that any less seriously than you would if it had full bipartisan support? This one appears to be strictly partisan right now.

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have not been advised of the nature of the committee in any detail, so I couldn't comment.

But we will continue to do everything we can to work with the Judiciary Committee and explore all the options that are available that would permit us to cooperate in every way proper.

Q Ms. Reno, you may be a witness in this investigation by Senator Danforth. Has he contacted you or the FBI director at all so far about whether or not you should be a witness?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think the appropriate thing, when Senator Danforth is in charge of the investigation, is to let him comment with respect to any step that he thinks is appropriate.

Thank you.

Q Thank you very much.

END.