

CNN INTERVIEW WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

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The editor of the report is Steve Ginsburg. Tim Ahmann, Eric Beech, Melissa Bland, Will Dunham, Peter Ramjug, and Paul Schomer assisted in editing this report.

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Q: Janet Reno breezed through two days of questioning from the Senate Judiciary Committee. She won support from both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, garnering a 92 to 0 vote in the Senate. Today Janet Reno officially becomes the U.S. attorney general, the first woman to hold the nation's highest law enforcement post. Reno is awaiting the swearing in ceremony this morning, and she joins us now live from the White House.

Good morning to you, Ms. Reno.

ATTORNEY GENERAL-DESIGNATE JANET RENO: Good morning.

Q: Congratulations to you on your swift confirmation after all the controversy leading up to the process. Did you expect it to go so smoothly?

RENO: It has been a very heartwarming experience and I'm going to try to do my very best to deserve the confidence that President Clinton has shown and that the United States Senate has shown me and try to do the best job I possibly can.

Q: One senator basically called the confirmation hearings a love fest. And after all the praise you received, I have to wonder, why did it take so long for your name to come up? Were you originally contacted in the initial search for attorney general?

RENO: I don't know the history of that. But I look forward to this challenge. I look forward to building on the foundation that I think I've developed with the Senate Judiciary Committee to work with all of Congress to address the issues that are so vital to America.

Q: During your years as Dade County prosecutor, you developed a reputation as someone who believed in reforming offenders, not just punishing.

Can you give me an example in which that worked for you?

RENO: One of the examples is our drug court, where we prosecuted non-violent first offenders charged with possession of a small amount of drugs and tried to approach it from a carrot and stick point of view saying you can get punished or you can get treatment. And those that successfully completed that program had far less occasion to commit further crime than those who have not.

Q: You raised the subject of drugs. A big concern today is cutting back on drug enforcement in the country without the budget, President Clinton wanting to spend less money in that area. How are you going to actually be able to prosecute criminals?

RENO: President Clinton made a promise to work with state and local law enforcement to get 100,000 more police officers on our streets. We want to work with state and local law enforcement throughout the nation to develop a partnership where we focus on street crime, on violent crime that undermines the very physical fabric of this society.

We want to make sure that we work with them to go after the dangerous offenders and provide alternative sentencing arrangements for the non-violent first offenders. I think working together we can have a real impact using our resources as wisely and as effectively as possible.

Q: I guess the question though is with those resources limited now as compared to what they have been in the past, where does that leave you?

RENO: I think if everybody works together you can avoid the duplication, you can avoid the waste, you can focus your resources, make sure that they're used in the right way, make sure that prisoners don't go through the revolving door, that those who commit dangerous crime, who are career criminals, that we put them away and keep them away, and that the federal government works with local law enforcement to do everything it can to see that that happens. While at the same time we break the cycle of crime for those who have not become deeply involved in criminal patterns and criminal activity.

We can do a lot if we use common sense and use our dollars wisely.

Q: Ms. Reno, one of the items that has had to put on hold as we awaited the appointment of an attorney general is the probe of FBI director William Sessions on ethics violations.

Where does that stand now?

RENO: When I get to the Justice Department I'm going to review all the reports, gather all the information that I think can possibly be relevant and make the most informed judgment I can in making my recommendation to the president.

Q: I know that another issue that will likely come up is the shooting which took place in your home state this week of Florida, a shooting in which an abortion doctor was killed by a protestor.

Is this a place you see the federal government getting involved?

RENO: I think we should do everything we can under federal law to protect a woman's right to choose, from physical restraints that people would try to place on it, and from tragedies such as occurred in this instance.

Q: And from early on, another issue you have raised is the protection of children. How do you see the federal government expanding its role there?

RENO: We want to look at everything we can do that's right and proper under federal law, and with federal laws to see that the children of America are given a chance to grow as strong, constructive, healthy human beings. It's the best investment we can possibly make in America.

Q: I guess, Ms. Reno, I'd like to wrap up this morning on a light note. And that would be just some of your thoughts. We're just about an hour away from the official swearing in ceremony.

Did you ever in all your years as a prosecutor expect to be standing where you are now, just right outside the White House?

RENO: No, it's a remarkable and wonderful feeling, and a great challenge, and I look forward to the opportunity to try to do my level best to be the best possible lawyer I can for the American people.

Q: And we thank you very much for joining us this morning. Wishing you the very best on this special day for you.

RENO: Thank you.

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