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Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. REND: Good morning.

Q Can we talk about gun control a little bit? Would any of  
the legislation that's pending in Congress right now had made a  
difference, if it had been enacted, in terms of what happened in the  
Long Island railroad?

ATTY GEN. REND: I understand that the assault weapons  
legislation that is pending in Congress would have prevented the sale  
of the ammunition, but that's something that we are exploring in more  
detail.

Q The president has suggested that he'd like to look at a  
system of licensing for handgun owners, or weapons owners -- firearms  
owners. You've endorsed such a proposal before. Can you tell us a  
little bit about what the system is in Florida and what your feelings  
in general are about this idea of licensing?

ATTY GEN. REND: Well, my concern arose in Florida because I  
watched people get gun licenses or carry guns easier than they  
obtained a driver's license. And I think it should be at least as  
hard to get a license to possess a gun as it is to drive an  
automobile.

Q Has the president asked you for a specific proposal or for  
legislation for licensing of handguns?

ATTY GEN. REND: He has asked us to explore what should be done  
in the area of licensing for handgun possession.

Q He's not saying anything about other weapons such as -- any (long ?) weapons, like rifles or -- (off mike)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't specifically heard any comment with respect to that, but we will review everything to make sure that we advise him as carefully as possible.

Q Is there an ongoing review in the department related to the subject of licensing and whether and how that is feasible on a national level?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have not concentrated on that as we have addressed the issue first to the Brady Bill and then the ban on assault weapons. But as you know, from the time of my confirmation, I've said what my personal feeling was with respect to the fact that I don't think somebody should have a gun unless they can demonstrate that they know how to safely and lawfully use it, that they're capable of safely and lawfully using it, and that they're willing to safely and lawfully use it.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: That is an area that we have been reviewing.

Q When will the department be specifically reviewing the request by the president for a national registration system and what kind of timetable -- (off mike) -- for the registration --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't addressed a registration system. I'm addressing --

Q A licensing system.

ATTY GEN. RENO: -- a licensing system. And I think that that is an important distinction. That's in the Office of Policy Development.

Q What do you think about registration?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think -- I don't like it.

Q Why not?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think it serves the purpose. I think the major purpose is to demonstrate that before somebody possesses a weapon they ought to simply -- it makes common sense that they evidence that they know how to safely and lawfully use it. If you let somebody -- if you don't let somebody drive an automobile unless they demonstrate that they know how to safely and lawfully use it, it seems to me the same principle should apply for a weapon.

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Q Isn't licensing a form of registration, because if you license you're going to just be in some kind of database -- (off mike)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: You can talk about terms, but I think the key is how you license and the fact that you -- that a person has got to have a license on them.

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(Cross talk.)

Q (Inaudible) -- registration alone doesn't really accomplish anything.

ATTY GEN. REND: I don't think registration serves any purpose in terms of what I think is the common-sense way to do it, which is you shouldn't have a gun unless you know how to safely and lawfully use it. And that applies to the people of the best of goodwill because when you look at the studies done, number one, of people killed with handguns in their own homes through mistaken acts and because of carelessness or improper training, I think it evidences again how important it is that before we possess a weapon we know how to safely and lawfully use it.

Q Is there no value, though, in linking the gun to its owner through registration?

ATTY GEN. REND: I think you -- again, the most important thing is to demonstrate that you know how to safely and lawfully use it.

Q Well, why not do both?

ATTY GEN. REND: I don't think that one would really serve that much purpose.

Q What about the Schumer bill? Representative Schumer, I think, was supposed to introduce legislation yesterday that was similar to this proposal. Are you --

ATTY GEN. REND: I have not seen that, I've just heard about it.

Q What happened in Florida -- it repeats an earlier question -- when you did propose that? Was that adopted?

ATTY GEN. REND: No.

Q Was it overwhelmingly defeated?

ATTY GEN. REND: No, it was really never considered. That was my proposition. And it was developed at a time when the state took over -- preempted local regulation of gun ownership and provided for a licensing procedure, if you will, and in effect, you could go to a gun store, have just the most superficial of training, and possess a gun.

One of my favorite stories was of a lady who was a casual acquaintance who came up to me and she sat down. "Janet, I'm going to be okay," and she patted her purse. And I said, "What's in there?"

And she said, "A gun." And I said, "You don't know how to use that." And I said, "Have you ever fired a gun before?" She said, "Yeah, they let me fire it once at the store." And I said, "You take that thing back until you know how to safely and lawfully use it." And I told her about tragedies that had occurred with people of the best of goodwill and weapons -- with weapons. I think she took it back, I've never been sure.

Q The police chief of Los Angeles has said that there should be some kind of a limitation on the number of guns that can be available or that can exist in any given jurisdiction. Do you favor any kind of effort to reduce the number of guns that are available, to restrict the number of guns that are available?

ATTY GEN. REND: I would have to address just what the chief is talking about before I could comment intelligently on his proposal.

Q When do you expect to be able to report back to the president on his request that you review what Giuliani recommended, and do you expect to be able to work effectively to be able to put -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. REND: That's your criticism, that's -- (laughter) --

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. REND: Well, I think that's again the press picking a fight between the White House and the Justice Department. I have had a wonderful working relationship. With respect to the Giuliani proposal, I don't know specifically what it is, but what the president asked us to do is to review what would be appropriate in terms of licenses.

Q When do you expect to be able to report back to him?

ATTY GEN. REND: As soon as possible.

Q But that doesn't -- that's sort of like -- (off mike).

ATTY GEN. REND: One of the things that you all love to do is to put deadlines on, and I understand it because I have always admired your abilities to meet deadlines day in and day out.

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Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: No, what I think the public wants is to make sure that the Department of Justice does it thoroughly and as soon as possible, and that's what we're going to do.

Q When did the president ask you to study this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We received an inquiry from him yesterday, and I have not talked with him personally about it.

Q Would licensing have prevented the Long Island shooting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know.

Q When did you first propose -- I'm not that familiar with Florida -- when did you first propose the licensing in that state? What year?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I proposed it, I would say, as early as 1984, '85. I don't have a recollection of the exact date.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: That will be one of the issues that we review, but I don't think -- just as you have freedom of speech, you do not have freedom to yell "fire" in a crowded theater. And I think that in all of these instances we must balance.

Q Do you favor any proposal at all, have you ever favored any proposal at all to limit the number of guns that are available?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno, what do you think needs to be done to better control guns --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think one of the first things that we have got to do is to get the ban on assault weapons passed. As I have advocated, I think that we should -- this is a personal feeling based on my experience in Florida, and we're going to review it in terms of a national strategy -- is that before a person possesses a weapon, they ought to demonstrate that they know how to safely and lawfully use it through a reasonable and non-arbitrary licensing procedure. It ought to be at least as hard to get a gun as it is to get a driver's license, and that there should be procedures for revocation of that license if a person demonstrates an inability to safely and lawfully use the weapon, and there should be vigorous prosecution and a penalty

that is commensurate with the crime for those people who possess a weapon without a license.

I think this would address the problem of many people who tell me, "Look, I've got to take my money to the bank, I feel unsafe." Fine. If you think you need to have a weapon and it's lawful in your state, at least demonstrate that you know how to safely and lawfully use it.

Q Would you like it be federal or state?

ATTY GEN. REND: That would be one of the issues that we will be reviewing. I've always talked about it in a context of state regulation.

Q In the states where you get your car license there's somebody that gives you a driver's test, it might be a state agency, a motor vehicle department or something that administers the licensing. How much more -- how many more people would you need. You'd have to set up a separate office. Who would be the revenueurs that would do the licensing?

ATTY GEN. REND: These would all have to be issues that would be addressed.

Q What would you do about people who just buy their guns off of street corners and sort of circumvent the whole system? Is there anything that can be done about that?

ATTY GEN. REND: Well, what I basically proposed in the past -- and, again, this is based -- is in a Florida context in terms of state regulation -- that we advise people that if the law were passed that you needed a license to possess a weapon and the license would be a reasonable procedure testing whether you knew how to safely and lawfully use it.

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And then if you did not have a license, that there should be prosecution. In many states now in Florida, the prosecution depends on the if the gun is concealed or not concealed and where you possess it and what you're doing with it. This makes a more reasonable approach based on common sense.

Q How's that stem violent crime -- (inaudible).

ATTY GEN. REND: I think one of the things that it does is give us a better regulation, a better chance to regulation people in terms of making sure that, okay, you got a gun, do you have a license to carry a gun, if not we're going to prosecute you and that there are not exceptions. But again, it comes back to just a common sense approach to using guns.

Q But given that criminals' use of guns is not necessarily a safety issue as one of -- (inaudible) -- what specifically does this do to stem gun violence?

ATTY GEN. REND: It will be far easier I think to prosecute. And, as I've indicated -- and, again, this is a proposal based on the larger context that it would give you the opportunity to prosecute without exception the person who possessed a weapon without a license who had not demonstrated that they knew how to safely and lawfully use it and that the person who would possess such a weapon in that context would perhaps be more -- a better potential candidate for crime.

As I have said on many occasions both here and in other situations, I think that the problem of violence in the United States is a very complex problem that goes both to punishment, punishment of the career criminal in getting that person sentenced to a sentence that fits the crime and making sure that we have enough prison cells to house that person so that he is not prematurely released from prison. I think it requires that we provide for others alternative sanctions that give them a chance to come back to the community and the chance of not committing further crime. I think it requires a heavy emphasis on juvenile crime, letting juveniles know that punished. After the punishment there should also be an opportunity to come back to the community with the chance of getting off on the right foot. And as you well know, I have talked a lot about what we can do about crime prevention.

I was impressed over the Thanksgiving Holiday with the visit I made to a Washington Hospital and to the trauma unit to see the incidence of violence represented in that trauma unit and to see that hospital having gone to the community, gone to schools in the community and the attachment areas served by the hospital to develop conflict resolution programs. They were evaluating those programs and



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early indications indicated that those programs can work. There are multiplicity of interventions that we can make in a common sense approach to doing something about violence in America and I think we're on our way to doing it.

Q It's fairly obvious how to check to see if somebody safely used a gun, but lawfully is another matter. Would that involve emotional, psychological testing? Checking their -- (inaudible)? How would you check to make sure that they're going to use it lawfully every time you screen them?

ATTY GEN. REND: One of the first things that I think you should do is test people in when you can use the gun and when you can't use the gun and what's lawful with respect to it. You would check and make sure based on their responses -- that they demonstrated that they knew how to safely and lawfully use it.

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Obviously, you might not be able to identify the first-time criminal, and those are the circumstances. But at least people, before they possess **that** weapon, would know under a licensing procedure that they had passed both tests.

Q Have you contacted the ATF to get their input in the proposal that you're going to give to the president?

ATTY GEN. REND: We have not -- I have not contacted them at this point. I've asked the Office of Policy Development to consult with all concerned.

Q FBI Director Freeh yesterday warned about a trend that he called broad federalization of laws by Congress in which they're passing a whole bunch of laws making federal crimes out of what are now state and local, including in the Senate crime bill, a law that would basically federalize most all gun crimes through the D'Amato Amendment. Do you share his concerns and are you going to speak out against amendments such as the D'Amato Amendment and others that put under the jurisdiction of federal -- of the Justice Department laws -- (inaudible) -- a state and local -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. REND: What I have always said is that we should have a principled approach to federal prosecution determining what should be prosecuted federally and what should be prosecuted in state court based on what is in the best interest of the community served. There may be situations where it is appropriate to handle a case in federal court for a variety of reasons. And what we're trying to do is to develop a real partnership with state and local law enforcement, with prosecutors, so that we handle the case not from the point of view of turf grabbing or of credit grabbing, but of what is in the best interest of the appropriate prosecution and that federal district.

Q I'm still not clear whether you share his concerns and whether you're specifically concerned about any amendments in the Senate crime bill?

ATTY GEN. REND: We're reviewing the crime bill at this point and we have not finished our analysis on that. As I have said, I am concerned when I see a case prosecuted in federal court when in the best interest of all concerned it's better prosecuted in state court. And what we want to try to do is to develop a principled approach to it that has as the ultimate goal what is best in that particular case for that federal district.

Q Can I ask about the fear of crime generally? Despite the tragic incident in New York and elsewhere, as you know, the UCRs and the victimization surveys are both going done. Given the actual facts

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about -- (inaudible) -- crime, are Americans justified to be much more fearful of crime than they used to be?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think any time you have crime at the level we have it in the United States people must be concerned. I have seen situations where crime has gone down in my community and I took some cheer in that. I know it can go up. We can never, ever relax our vigilance with respect to crime in America, and I think that's what too often happens is that we become complacent. I think we've got to tackle this crime problem, make sure it keeps going down. And I feel encouraged, but I certainly don't think it's time to turn to something else.

Q Ms. Reno, do you think that -- in retrospect now, looking back at this past year, do you think that perhaps you have spoken too often about crime prevention and too often about your concerns about children?

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You're being criticized anonymously from the White House and Capitol Hill and more pointedly by conservatives and Republicans for being soft on crime. Do you think in retrospect you should have made more and harsher speeches about the crime problem, the way you're talking this morning, and less about the prevention and the root causes?

ATTY GEN. REND: No. (Laughter.)

Q What do you think, and why? Why?

ATTY GEN. REND: You all give me these bully pulpits. I have spoken throughout America about a balanced approach to crime. I have spoken as often about putting the bad guys away and keeping them away from the day I appeared in the Rose Garden, and that's what America wants. America wants dangerous people off the streets. I've spoken about the need for developing enough prison cells to make sure the bad people, both in the state system and the federal system, go away. I've talked about alternative sanctions, pointing out to people it makes no sense in the world to send somebody off to prison with a drug abuse problem and return them to the streets without doing something about it. They're going to be right back at it, and the American people understand that from a common sense point of view.

I have talked to the National Sheriffs Association, police, prosecutors, the League of Cities and others about the need for prevention, and wherever I go in America, people are saying it makes sense, we have got to make punishment a reality for that youngster who puts a gun up beside somebody's head and hurts them. But so many of us have looked at that youngster and his history and see every point along the way where we could have intervened to make a difference.

Q What do you think of the idea of trying 13-year olds as adults?

ATTY GEN. REND: I've tried 13-year olds as adults.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. REND: Don't have any comment on a pending case.

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. REND: Don't have any comment.

Q (Off mike) -- is less than a month away. Have you had any indication from the networks that they are going to comply with a reduction in violent episodes during peak child-watching hours?

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ATTY GEN. REND: NBC has met with me, has been very forthcoming. I think we are making progress, and I feel very gratified by their response. I think we have got to focus on the cable industry. I think we've got to focus on videos. And I think it's important that we all work together not just to reduce the violence during hours that children have access to TV or with respect to videos but that we do everything we can to make sure that TV is used as a wonderful and positive medium as well.

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And I think you can portray the grim realities of the world and do so accurately and educate people and keep them informed and at the same time use it as a positive medium.

Q Are you seeking meetings with the people in the cable industry and --

ATTY GEN. RENO: At this point, we're reviewing it with the networks, and then we're going to take it one step at a time.

Q Ms. Reno -- (off mike) --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not received the report from the deputy on that.

Q On the gun-licensing question, would this be a license to own any gun? In other words, you'd go down and you'd take the safety test at the beginning of the year; you'd qualify to be a gun owner. You could thereafter buy another gun after that. Or would you have to qualify every time --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have --

Q -- so that the license would, in effect, be registration?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We have not completed the review yet.

Q Ms. Reno?

Q But do you think people should be licensed to own guns in general or to own a specific gun?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We've not completed the review yet.

Q Ms. Reno, with the incident in New York the other day with the shooting on the train, do you believe that will increase the public sentiment, also in Congress, to go with the tougher gun control? And do you see any problem that this could be a danger that they go too far, that the laws will become too extensive?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I think that everybody is interested in trying to develop an appropriate balance. The president has spoken of how he was raised in a world that appreciated hunting, that looked forward to the hunting season. There is always going to be a balance. And I think that we can effect a balance that puts it in proper perspective and not with this focus on guns that we've had for far too long in America.

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Q Ms. Reno, are you favor of the licensing of hunters who possess a shotgun --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can tell you -- I've already told you what I personally think, but we haven't finished the review at this point with what we will recommend to the president.

Q (Off mike) -- limit on the number of guns. I'm wondering why not limit the number that are out there that -- (off mike) -- registration. So why not favor a ban on --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I favor a ban on them having guns.

Q Pardon me?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I favor a ban on criminals having guns.

Q On the assault weapons ban, do you favor that -- (off mike) --

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're in the process of reviewing that.

Q What about the manufacture of assault weapons and handguns in this country? Should we have better controls on --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, we are in the process of reviewing all of that for the president to make a recommendation to him.

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Q Ms. Reno -- (off mike) -- state jurisdiction and disagreed. Would you then -- the Justice Department -- then be prepared to go to the Congress before the next year --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I never deal in "what ifs." What I'm trying to do is to go over the crime bill to see just what was passed and make an appropriate recommendation --

Q But that would be the only time where you have an opportunity really -- (off mike) --

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I said, I don't answer "what ifs." What I did say was that we're in the process of reviewing the crime bill, going over it in detail. When Congress returns, we will be working with Congress to come up with the best bill possible.

Q Just to make sure that I understand the licensing procedure, would that be for any firearm, and is there any state that has this now as far as you know?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have -- we have not finished the review of it. I mean, we just got the request from the president yesterday, and we're in the process of making a recommendation.

Q But is there any state that has this now as far as you know?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're in the process of reviewing it.

Q Did he specifically asked you for proposal on the licensing of handguns or all weapons?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're in the process of making a recommendation to the president with respect to what is appropriate.

Q Ms. Reno, is the -- (off mike) --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know anything about that. I'll be happy to have Carl check for you.

Q Do you think there's any justification -- or would be a good idea to legalize any drugs?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno?

Q How do you feel about Dr. Elders making that suggestion?



ATTY GEN. RENO: I didn't hear her comments, but I have consistently opposed the legalization of drugs because, as I have told you, I have seen so many instances where the prosecution, the arrest, produced finally a willingness on the part of the person to seek treatment. And I just don't think it would be effective. I think too many treatment specialists have told me that the criminal justice system properly balanced between punishment and treatment can really force people into treatment and end the cycle of drug abuse.

Q You have expressed concerns about yourself investigating Ron Brown, a fellow member of the Cabinet. Are you considering waiting for the independent counsel law to take effect and then turning that case over to the independent counsel?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm not gauging anything based on a law that's not in existence. We will continue to conduct the investigation in as thorough and as professional a manner as possible.

Q Ms. Reno, if you've gone over this, I apologize. (Off mike.) Why do you believe it would be effective or wouldn't be effective to combat crime to limit the number of guns one can own -- (off mike) -- why wouldn't it be effective?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't -- I must be missing something, because I don't understand your proposal about limiting the number of guns in America. I want to keep guns, no matter how many guns there are, out of the hands of people who don't belong to have them. And I can't count those number of guns.

Q But Schumer was proposing yesterday that you could only buy one gun a year. My question was, why not limit the number of guns a person may own?

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ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated, I have not seen Congressman Schumer's proposal, and we will be reviewing that.

Q But you're generally against the concept, from what you've said, of limiting the available number of guns, either banning guns, limiting to one gun to a person.

ATTY GEN. RENO: If you have a specific proposal, I'll look at that, but if your question was, "Do you want to limit the number of guns in America?" I don't know how many guns I have to limit. I want to limit the number of guns in the hands of people who don't belong to have them.

Q Perhaps I poorly phrased it. Do you believe it would be effective to limit the number of guns which an individual may own?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're going to review that if that's part of Congressman Schumer's bill and part of the overall review that we're doing for the president.

Q And again, why wouldn't registration be effective in fighting crime?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I, again, think that registration does not go to the issue of do you know how to safely and lawfully use the weapon.

Q But couldn't it be used to trace who owns a gun if the gun is -- (inaudible)? This is -- (inaudible) -- but I just don't understand why it wouldn't be effective.

ATTY GEN. RENO: If somebody has a proposal on it, we always consider it, but at this point I would like to focus on what I think can possibly have a real impact.

Q Ms. Reno, from a First Amendment perspective, Senator Nickles called for the firing of Dr. Elders for suggesting that there should be dialogue about drug legalization. What do you think of his comment, you know, from a constitutional perspective?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't think Dr. Elders should be fired.

Q What role do you see for the Office of Professional Responsibility -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm sorry, I didn't hear your whole --

Q What role do you see for the continued operation of the Office of Professional Responsibility -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. REND: What I want to do -- as I understood it when I took office, that office had had a backlog. I want to make sure that that backlog is addressed in a very thorough manner, that we eliminate the backlog, that we give OPR the staff to eliminate that backlog, and do it the right way.

MR. : You're needed over at some other place. (Laughter.)

ATTY GEN. REND: Oh. Thank you.

Q Thank you.

END