

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO'S WEEKLY MEDIA AVAILABILITY

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT.

Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Q You have an announcement?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q (Chuckles.) Ms. Reno, there's a report in USA Today today that the government is considering dropping all charges against Terry

Nichols. Can you make that announcement this morning, or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: No.

Q Just to straighten out -- (the report is ?) James Nichols, but I take it you still --

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

Q Right. Do you expect something today?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We shall see.

Q (Chuckles.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: What a wonderful press availability!
(Laughter.)

(Cross talk.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, let me ask you all some questions.
(Laughter.) Mr. Ostrow (sp), what's it like to be a reporter for the Los Angeles Times?

Q Right now it's a tree falling in the -- (laughter) --

Q Attorney General, I wonder, could you comment on Colombia, the recent arrests of the Cali cartel leaders, and could you make a comment on that? And I know that the Justice Department seems to me that it's going to help in new ways the Colombian Justice Department.

ATTY GEN. RENO: We congratulate the Colombian police and the (PISCOL ?) and the law enforcement personnel who have been involved in this effort. It is just an excellent effort, and we look forward to working with them to do everything possible to see that justice is done consistent with all the interests involved.

Q Is there a new assistance from your department to Colombia?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We continually review everything that can be done to see what would be appropriate and be supportive of making sure these figures are brought to justice and that they are sentenced to appropriate sentences that fit the crime.

Q There are reports of concern in the U.S. government about the growing importance of some organizations of narco-traffickers in Mexico. Are you taking some actions to deal with that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I went to the inauguration of the -- of President Zedillo and had the chance to meet almost immediately with the new attorney general, Lozano. Since then we've had the chance to meet again, and we have an excellent working relationship. I am very pleased with the steps that the attorney general has taken and have really appreciated the opportunity to work with him.

Q While we're on the subject of drugs, Robert Novak, in his column this morning, repeated allegations that U.S. military figures believe members of the current Haitian government are involved in drug trafficking.

Is there any substance at all to these reports?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I haven't seen Mr. Novak's column this morning so I can't really comment.

Q Well, on the reports themselves. I mean, it's not the first

ATTY GEN. RENO: One of the things that I've learned is not to take something out of context, to look at it before I comment on whether -- what he's asking about.

Q Ms. Reno, back to Colombia for a minute. Is there any thought on the part of our government that those arrested there have some relationship to the allegations that drug money has gone into President Samper's campaign and there is other corruption in the government?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I really couldn't comment on that except to say that we are working with the Colombian police and law enforcement officials in every way that is appropriate.

Q Ms. Reno, coming back to Oklahoma City, I'm wondering, without going into the specifics of the case as it stands, if you can talk to us at all about the nature of the investigation and if there are any broader political implications to this, if this is a sign of something that we ought to be worried about; and how difficult a case has it been to manage? Can you just talk a little bit about the context of this investigation? And not being able to talk about the details, we also don't know how difficult it's been. We know that there have been a lot of people working on it. But can you characterize the case for us in some way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First of all I'll tell you -- you've made a statement about broader political consequences. This investigation was conducted based on the evidence and the law and confined to that arena, and it's important that it be focused in that arena. Secondly, I just want to commend all the people involved. Many agencies worked together. The FBI worked with state and local agencies, with other federal agencies. Prosecutors around the country worked together. It has been just a tremendous effort on the part of many people. Obviously, it is a complex investigation, but I'm very proud and would like to commend the people who've worked on it. I think they've done a great job.

Q Is it -- are there -- when I talked about the broader implications of it, what I meant is in a sense is it possible to see this attack on the government and really -- as something that might be a wakeup call for worrying about future problems? And in terms of -- that's part of it. And in terms of the investigation, can you -- is there a precedent for something this large and this complicated?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know of any precedent for this tragedy and this case.

Clearly, you don't want to generalize from one specific situation. Any time something like this happens it requires that everybody be vigilant and try to do everything we can to avoid such a tragedy for the future.

Q Ms. Reno, were you consulted about the government's approach to -- (off mike)? Were you in on that?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment on how the investigation has been conducted except to say that they have taken appropriate steps to keep me advised.

Q Were you part of the decision-making to tighten security at airports this week?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I would not comment on any aspect of decisions with respect to security, but that is, as I understand it, as basically done by the secretary of Transportation.

Q Could we ask you, without commenting on the specifics of the case or trying to put you on the spot, how --

ATTY GEN. RENO: You all would never put me on the spot!
(Laughter.)

Q I'm trying to find out what you can tell us rather than what you can't, which just seems to be --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I really -- it is so important -- and I understand your position. You need to get as much information as you can. I'm in the position, though, where I have got to let the case be tried in the court. And so it really is -- I think I have described generally what can be said. But to discuss it further I think is inconsistent with letting the case be tried in the court.

Q Can you tell us how satisfied you are at this point with the way the investigation is going? I wouldn't have to remind you of all the speculation in the press that there might be a wider conspiracy or that perhaps all the people involved haven't come to light yet. But given what you have in hand, how satisfied are you with the way the case is going?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think I've already said that I am so impressed with the work done by investigators and prosecutors across the country, state and local law enforcement working with federal agents. I think they have done an excellent job.

Q At the start of the investigation there was concern about whether this was a widespread conspiracy involving perhaps these militia groups. Now it appears that it's only involving a handful of people. Do you think the American people will be satisfied to think that such a massive crime could be pulled off by only two or three guys?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think again we have got to let the facts come out as part of the overall prosecution, and that's where we should comment.

Q When will those facts come out? Will you have something more to say to us about it today or --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would anticipate that there will be further statements shortly.

Q Some Republicans in Congress are talking about renewing their bid to repeal the assault weapons ban once they come back from the recess, and they've kind of acknowledged they've delayed that

effort because of the fallout from the Oklahoma City bombing. Does the Oklahoma City bombing and the renewed emphasis on the Waco situation, does that put a higher emphasis on gun control legislation or in your view does it affect the gun debate one way or another?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is very important that America focus on what that ban does. It bans weapons that have no purpose but to kill, that have no recreational purpose; and that we focus on that issue, understand it, that we not generalize from one issue to another but that we focus on what's right and do it.

Q Over the past several days, I'm sure you're aware, the defense attorneys for the people who are apparently going to be the subject of the grand jury action today have made a great deal out of your statements and the president's statements about seeking the death penalty in this case. Can you go back over what was your reasoning when you made those statements and would you make them again?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, what was clear at the time, that anybody who committed such an awful act that the death penalty, under all circumstances known, would be certainly dictated.

Q Do you think that put any undue pressure on the prosecutors in this case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, this whole matter will continue to be reviewed consistent with the attorney general's manual, consistent with the law of this nation, and the decisions will be made based on the evidence and the law.

Q I wanted to change the subject, if I could, to Mr. Nussbaum's testimony yesterday in the Whitewater case. He said in effect, trying to justify his actions a couple of years ago resisting the Justice Department looking at the files, "How would you like the Justice Department looking at your files?" Is that the kind of statement that -- the attitude that you would hope for or expect from the counsel to the president?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not heard his testimony so I really couldn't comment on it. Again, what we were trying to do is to work with all concerned to make sure that it was done the right way.

Q Just a couple of questions about affirmative action. A couple of weeks ago the president called for mending not ending affirmative action. I'm wondering what the Justice Department is doing in terms of the mending part of it. Are you moving ahead in that arena?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As you probably know, our Office of Legal Counsel has issued a statement that will serve as a guide for agencies.

And we in the Department of Justice will be working with federal agencies to apply these guidelines, to apply the experience that state and local government had after the earlier decision of the Supreme Court which applied strict scrutiny to state and local affirmative action plans. And we will be working together to make sure that those guidelines and the experience of state and local governments are applied to ensure that affirmative action is done the right way.

Q Just in terms of -- there's some talk of a review of the University of California regents' action. Could you -- (inaudible) ?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have heard -- I have received no report concerning just the initial review. But that would be a separate issue, to see whether the -- the question was raised as to whether there were any federal requirements that must be met. We would -- I have not received any report on that at this time.

Q On the antitrust front, this week you issued a statement saying that you would not be intervening in the -- the initial distribution of Microsoft's new Windows program. That's been interpreted to mean that there won't be any intervention on that product. Is that -- is that a correct interpretation that it's going to be -- we're going to let it --

ATTY GEN. RENO: My understanding, and I'll ask Carl to furnish you the actual statement itself, was that we would not be intervening prior to August 24th but the investigation would be continuing.

Q Ms. Reno, back to Oklahoma City, there was an unidentified body part -- I believe a leg with camouflaged clothing and a boot -- found at Oklahoma City. There's been some speculation in the press that this may have been a fourth bombing conspirator. Has there been any progress in identifying who that person was?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I cannot comment on the evidence. I would just urge you, as I have urged you all along, not to jump to conclusions based on speculation in the press.

Q The anti-terrorism bill was stalled by the House Judiciary Committee. Some of the Republican members don't want to be added --

give the added intelligence authority to the FBI. Do you think there's going to be an anti-terrorism bill this year?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I feel sure that there will be. We had an opportunity early on to meet with leaders, both Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress, and I think everyone is agreed that we must provide the tools necessary to defend against terrorism while at the same time adhering to constitutional protections. And I think that legislation does just that. And it is very important that we get it passed.

Q On the anti-terrorism bill, that bill also attempts to speed the habeas process. At the same time the appropriations bill for Justice and the judiciary is eliminating money for death penalty centers which provide legal counsel to inmates on death row and it is being -- some people are speculating that that may actually tighten the bottleneck because it'll be harder and harder to find lawyers to represent prisoners on death row.

Any comment on that, since -- (inaudible) -- contradictions?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think counsel in death penalty cases who are familiar with the legal issues involved in death penalty prosecutions is very important in terms of insuring that there is no bottleneck. And we will be trying to work with all concerned to address that issue.

Q Ms. Reno, earlier this week the Criminal Division here said it was starting a preliminary investigation into allegations that -- allegations of embezzlement by an Archer Daniels Midland Company executive who was acting as an undercover operative for the Antitrust Division in a separate case. Beyond that criminal investigation, if these allegations are true, it suggests a wrongdoing while this fellow was under the supervision of the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office in the Antitrust Division. Are there any systematic sort of things that you're looking at as well, beyond the criminal investigation, to see if there were supervisory questions, other problems in the use of the this individual?

ATTY GEN. RENO: First of all, we want to pursue all allegations and make sure they're done as thoroughly as possible. And then as -- after the investigation is conducted and all allegations of wrongdoing are pursued, then we will make a judgment as to what the appropriate results are.

Q So there is no internal review going on right now in terms of how this particular witness was handled during a multi-year undercover operation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: As I indicated, we are reviewing all issues that are raised in both -- all the pending matters to make sure that we pursue any allegation of wrongdoing, and then we will take appropriate steps.

Q Ms. Reno, in less than a month, hearings on Ruby Ridge are scheduled on Capitol Hill. And there are two investigations, I believe, still going on: one by the local prosecutor, and you have a further internal review. Can you -- do those hearings present a problem for the Justice Department if they take place while these investigations are still going on? And would someone from this department testify at those hearings?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We want to work with the Senate to make sure that those investigations -- to do everything we can to make sure that those investigations are not in any way hampered by any other matter, and we will try to do just that.

But it is important that those investigations take their course to ensure every allegation of misconduct or wrongdoing or possible criminal violation under state law is pursued.

Q Would you ask or do you prefer that they hold off on those hearings?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will be working with the Senate to try to address these issues.

Q If I could just ask one more question, you said you're reviewing --

ATTY GEN. RENO: You can ask more than one question.

Q Well, I'm sorry. I'm simply trying to make sure that I understand what was said. You said you're reviewing all issues and will try to address all allegations of wrongdoing. I'm simply trying to make sure -- does that include allegations of wrongdoing by federal law enforcement agents in this particular case or is the focus right now --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have not received any such allegations, but if

any allegations arise during the course of the investigation, they would be pursued too.

Q Back to Oklahoma City again, would you participate here in Washington in any decision about agreeing to a change of venue in the trial -- in any trial if this should come up, or would you -- do you -- I know the U.S. attorney has said in Oklahoma City that he'd like to see any case tried there. Do you have any feelings about it one way or another?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We will review all the motions or any pleadings that are filed with respect to the issue and make a determination as appropriate.

Q Does that mean at the moment it's open to --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, we'll review any motion or information relating to it and make the appropriate determinations at the time.

Q Ms. Reno -- (inaudible) -- Mexico may become, or the cartels of Mexico may become more powerful than the Cali cartel if the tendency continues. Do you think that's an accurate statement?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important that whenever we address the issue of drug trafficking, we know that it will extend beyond the boundaries of one nation into another and that we pursue these issues in a comprehensive way. Again, we have had just an excellent working relationship with the attorney general of Mexico, and we look forward to continuing in that effort to focus on those issues that his government thinks are so important as well.

Q Can I ask you about violent crime for a second? As you know, violent crime has apparently gone down recently in some of the major cities, New York and elsewhere, and there are many different theories why this is happening.

One of them is that the major factor is the big increase in incarcerating violent criminals, as the report from this department indicated yesterday. What is your theory on this? Are we -- have we reached a turning point? And is that the major cause?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think what -- there are many factors that come into it. I have said from -- for many years that one of the keys is the prosecution, conviction, and appropriate sentence for career criminals, and making sure that we have enough prison cells to keep

those career criminals in prison for the length of their sentence. I think that can have an impact.

I think it is clear that, in cities such as New York City, additional police officers that have been added to the department over the last several years have had a significant impact. Community policing is a tremendous initiative in so many communities, large and small, and it is having an impact. Prevention programs are making a critical difference. The focus of this nation on violence against women and domestic violence, I think, is so important, because we're beginning to interrupt the cycle of violence where too often it begins, which is in the home. There are so many initiatives that are being taken, and it is encouraging.

At the same time, I'd like to point out to you some factors that I think must cause us to renew our efforts, particularly with respect to youth violence, which I have identified as one of the single great crime problems in America today. As I understand it, the youth population of America, ages 14 to 17, has been slightly declining in the last years, while at the same time, youth violence in the category -- age category 14 to 17 has gone up dramatically since 1989. What is so alarming is that the population, the number of people in the age group of 14 to 17, is expected to increase significantly between now and the year 2005. Unless we turn around this -- the forces that have caused youth violence, we're going to be in serious trouble as the youth population increases in this nation.

That's the reason it's so important that we renew our efforts to provide programs for serious violent youthful offenders, that detain them, provide secure facilities, so that they will not endanger the populace, but that we recognize that those kids are coming back to the community, and that we develop after-care programs that can make a difference. That's the reason it is so important that we provide sufficient resources to the juvenile justice system.

Right now judges, youth counselors, detention facilities are so overwhelmed that they oftentimes don't see the kid until the second or third or possibly fourth offense. It is important at that first offense that we have the capacity to analyze what caused the problem and take steps at that first offense to provide appropriate sanctions and appropriate treatment that keep that kid out of trouble.

At the same time, it is important that we develop community policing programs. And I'm really proud of what the COPS office is doing, our office that is responsible for distributing the monies for the 100,000 police officers. They've developed technical assistance

programs and an initiative with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as to how cities can focus community policing on youth violence and youth crime and youth delinquency. But at the same time, it is clear as you look at the figures, and the same study that I was alerted to this week shows that when you are looking at juvenile crime, when it spikes is about after 3:00 in the afternoon when the kids get out of school. If you take that data, what it indicates is that we need programs after school and in the evenings that can keep our kids occupied.

You have so many families in which both parents are working or a single parent is working or there is neglect of the child, and we need to make sure that our children have an opportunity to grow in a strong, constructive way. Experts across this country, including sheriffs, including police chiefs and police officers on the line, have told me again and again we've got to provide programs for kids in the afternoon and in the evening, we've got to provide good, constructive jobs, we've got to enhance our school-to-work program so that kids come out of school with skills that can enable them to earn a living wage. We can do an awful lot if we approach this from a balanced point of view, letting a kid know that if they put a gun up beside somebody's head and hurt them, they're going to be punished, and that punishment is going to fit the crime. But at the same time, we're going to develop prevention programs and after-care programs that can give these kids a chance to grow in a strong and constructive way.

Q Shortly I suppose the American people are going to see the face of Joe -- (inaudible name) -- on television as the indictment is released. Can you tell us what it is about him that caused you to pick him to go in and prosecute this case? What qualities does he bring to the case, both technical and human qualities?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We searched through the Department of Justice, through the U.S. attorneys offices, for people who had had experience in complex litigation, who had been involved in cases that required attention to detail, bringing together a great deal of evidence.

We identified some really extraordinary prosecutors. The deputy and I had a chance to meet with several of them after they had been interviewed by others. We were so impressed with Joe, with his experience, with his approach to the case, with his ability to pull diverse groups together, and that's what went into it.

Thank you very much.