



1

UNITED STATES

2

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

3

- - -

4

5

PRESS CONFERENCE OF THE

6

HONORABLE JANET RENO,

7

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

8

- - -

9

10

Department of Justice

11

9th and Constitution, N.W.

12

Washington, D.C.

13

Thursday, October 16, 1997

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 (9:29 a.m.)

3 VOICE: Shall we have at-ya?

4 (Laughter.)

5 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think you should

6 declare a moratorium after yesterday.

7 VOICE: Ms. Reno, has the Justice Department set

8 up a mechanism under which either you or other

9 investigators can interview the President on any aspect of
10 the fundraising investigation?

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not
12 comment on how this investigation is being conducted.

13 QUESTION: Have you had contact with the White
14 House?

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

16 QUESTION: On Sunday the example that was posed
17 to you, which was the picture of the President talking to

18 Mr. Huria Tanada saying, James Riady sent me, you did say

19 Sunday that that's the kind of situation that you would

20 want to talk to the President about. Is that what you

21 meant?

22 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I did say that on

23 Sunday.

24 QUESTION: So in other words, you do want to

25 talk to him about that?

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not
2 comment on how we're going to conduct the investigation,
3 when interviews take place, what's going to be discussed
4 in these interviews.

5 QUESTION: We're not asking for specifics.
6 We're just asking whether there's a mechanism, should you
7 need to talk to the President, you personally, or should
8 the investigators need to talk to the President, have you
9 worked out the logistics? Will it occur in a room in the

10 White House?

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not

12 comment on how it's going to be done.

13 QUESTION: Yesterday before the Judiciary

14 Committee you said that you had worked out an agreement

15 with the Director of the FBI that you wouldn't close off

16 any avenue of the investigations without his approval, I

17 think is the word you used.

18 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I said is what I

19 have always tried to do is work with the law enforcement

20 agencies to make sure that any disagreement with respect

21 to investigative strategy -- not legal decisions, not

22 charging decisions, not decisions to invoke the

23 Independent Counsel Act or not -- but that investigative

24 decisions within the purview of the FBI come to the

25 Director and me if there is disagreement, and I think

4

1 we've always been able to work those out.

2 QUESTION: Can you tell us when you made that

3 decision to include Director Freeh in all signoffs in this
4 investigation?

5 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have done that in the
6 weeks that we have been involved in trying to build the
7 management of the task force and Director Freeh and I are
8 now meeting weekly with the task force to make sure that
9 issues such as this are addressed.

10 QUESTION: Is that a fairly recent decision on
11 your part?

12 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is a recent decision

13 to have the weekly meetings with Director Freeh and myself

14 both there so that we can make sure that everything is on

15 track and that the investigation is proceeding.

16 QUESTION: The impression is, though, that

17 you're trying to shore up confidence in your

18 decisionmaking. Isn't that the case?

19 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think one of the

20 things that I noticed from the headlines this morning is

21 that you never read anything -- believe everything that

22 you read in the newspaper. What we again are trying to do

23 is not abdicate our responsibility. The legal decisions

24 are mine, but to try to make sure that we explore all the

25 opportunities, all the appropriate alternatives, and have

5

1 a full and frank discussion, and that we make sure that

2 appropriate leads are followed.

3 QUESTION: Don't you think this is tantamount to

4 giving the Director of the FBI a veto power over these
5 decisions?

6 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think so. As I
7 indicated to you, the legal decisions are mine.

8 QUESTION: General Reno, the most important
9 legal decision it appears you have to make right now as
10 you go through this preliminary investigation is whether
11 or not 607 applies to the President and the Vice
12 President. Is that something you'd talk to Director Freeh

13 on regarding the legal decision?

14 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would be consulting

15 everybody in terms of making decisions such as that. But

16 the final decision with respect to any legal decision is

17 mine: the decision with respect to the Independent

18 Counsel Act, the charging decisions, and any decision with

19 respect to the law.

20 QUESTION: Why did you try to bring Freeh in at

21 this point, in this way, and not earlier? What was your

22 thinking about why to do this now?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we have tried to do

24 since we have added to the task force and added management

25 to the task force, A, is to make sure that the Director

6

1 and I are fully advised through these weekly meetings on

2 just what's happening, what the resource situation is,

3 what issues might exist that we can focus on, and make

4 sure that everybody has addressed the issue in the best

5 way possible.

6 QUESTION: Did you feel that that was lacking

7 before?

8 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I thought what happened

9 was there might be a tension between investigators and the

10 lawyers, and that supervisors would try to work it out.

11 In the rush of the day, I don't think that some of these

12 issues were worked out, and I just want to make sure that

13 they are addressed in the fullest way possible.

14 QUESTION: You talk about the difference between
15 investigative decisions and legal decisions. In other
16 words, if you feel that you have enough evidence about a
17 certain area you're pursuing and you want to close that
18 off, the Director has the ability to say no, we'd like to
19 keep going?

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What would happen is if
21 an agent wanted to take another step the Director and I
22 would sit down. If that step were appropriate, we would

23 proceed.

24 QUESTION: But if you had determined that a law

25 didn't apply, like 607, would the Director also be able to

7

1 say, no, we'd like to keep evaluating that law?

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He would not be able --

3 again, I'm receptive to anybody's opinion, but I have to

4 make the final decision under the law.

5 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, has the Director ever been

6 accorded a similar kind of authority in any other case?

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Director and I on a

8 number of occasions where there has been disagreements has

9 been able to sit down and work out these issues so that we

10 are in accord.

11 QUESTION: Could you say in what cases those

12 are?

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I can't give you

14 specific examples.

15 QUESTION: Aren't you worried that you might be
16 micromanaging things?

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

18 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, last Wednesday a paper
19 raised, or it was reported on anyway, that former
20 President Reagan in the White House was soliciting
21 donations from Republican donors. Is that part of your
22 investigation as well?

23 The task force is looking into Congressional
24 Republican situations. Is that part of it as well, or is

25 it strictly on the White House side the Vice President Al

8

1 Gore and President Clinton?

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, first with respect

3 to President Reagan, whatever happened there, my

4 understanding is that the statute of limitations has run.

5 With respect to any other area, we're again

6 pursuing all appropriate leads.

7 QUESTION: Anything having to do with former

8 President Bush, would the statute of limitations have run

9 there as well?

10 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

11 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have you taken any steps to

12 determine whether you or other senior officials of the

13 Department, say people who are in confirmable positions,

14 have had contact with any of the non-covered individuals

15 who are alleged to have attempted to influence U.S.

16 Government policy during the time they were allegedly

17 doing that?

18 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We know of none. But

19 what we've constantly tried to do is to review any

20 information that is developed to see if there is any

21 situation which would create a conflict or which would

22 trigger the act.

23 QUESTION: Was there a systematic effort to

24 determine whether any of the senior actors in the

25 Department had contact with people who are the subject of

1 these kind of allegations?

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There has been no

3 systematic effort to determine whether there's contact in

4 the sense of whether there was two people standing

5 together in the White House. But what we have tried to

6 review is any situation that might address the issue of

7 conflict.

8 QUESTION: White House counsel, the President's

9 lawyer, has said publicly that he is talking with the

10 Justice Department about trying to arrange a way the

11 President could be interviewed. I understand you can't

12 tell us whether that's happened, but why would you need to

13 do that?

14 You don't ordinarily negotiate with potential

15 people you want to talk to that you want to talk to them.

16 What would be different about talking to someone like the

17 President or Vice President?

18 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I can't comment on how
19 this investigation is being conducted. I can tell you,
20 when you talk to witnesses there are sometimes extensive
21 discussions as to how you will talk to them, what the
22 circumstances are, where it will be. And I don't think
23 that there is anything unusual in that.

24 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, can the President be
25 subpoenaed?

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment

2 because I think it again comes to the issues related to

3 this --

4 QUESTION: Ms. Reno --

5 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa,

6 whoa, whoa.

7 I think it would be a comment on the

8 investigation.

9 QUESTION: Previously, in talking about the

10 President you said you would not comment on how it was
11 going to be done, if I heard you correctly. I don't mean
12 to parse your sentences, but that seemed to indicate a
13 fair certainty on your part that it will happen. Am I
14 hearing you correctly?

15 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

16 QUESTION: Would it follow that the Vice

17 President would be interviewed as well?

18 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

19 QUESTION: Are you aware of contacts between
20 some of the non-covered persons and Justice Department
21 officials?

22 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am not aware of --
23 some people may have known each other. There are, as I
24 understand it, some connections. But I am not aware of
25 any meeting at which a non-covered person -- again, when

11

1 you talk about some of the non-covered people, obviously

2 there were people in the White House that have been
3 mentioned for which there is no specific and credible
4 evidence where there was contact. So it's rather
5 difficult for me to answer your question unless you can be
6 more specific.

7 QUESTION: Can you cite for me if it's been
8 called to your attention any of these, any of these
9 contacts?

10 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Give me a name?

11 QUESTION: No, I'm asking you for some.

12 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, I'm not quite sure

13 to whom you're referring, so that's what is confusing to

14 me.

15 QUESTION: These are White House officials.

16 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That's what I was --

17 QUESTION: How about the fundraisers, of which

18 there's a compilation of people who are the subject of

19 specific allegations, and who have --

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm not aware of any.

21 In terms of contacts, I don't know whether anybody has met

22 any of these people, what the circumstances are. I'm

23 aware of no situation which would create a conflict.

24 QUESTION: The Department and the FBI are

25 receiving the evidences that were subpoenaed from the

12

1 White House now. Are you satisfied that you're getting

2 what you want? And can you speak at all to the issue of

3 obstruction of justice that was raised, especially by the

4 Republicans yesterday, that the White House is stalling on

5 the evidence?

6 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I can't.

7 QUESTION: There are a couple of cases on the

8 tape, a big, big dinner and a much smaller dinner, that

9 looked, an Asian American, in the one case Asian, people

10 at the dinner, where the President appeared to acknowledge

11 that there are foreigners in the room. Is that something

12 that you think would require further investigation and

13 might that be the kind of thing that would lead to an

14 investigation of the President because it might indicate

15 in some way that he knew there were foreign donors in the

16 room?

17 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We're reviewing all the

18 tapes.

19 QUESTION: Have they been working around the

20 clock? This is an enormous amount of material.

21 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: They're working as hard

22 as they can to make sure that we not only review the

23 tapes, but that we proceed on other avenues of the

24 investigation.

25 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, are you going to view any

13

1 of the tapes yourself?

2 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I'm not. I have no

3 plans to review them. At this point, again, they're part

4 of an overall investigation, an investigation that

5 includes those tapes and much, much more. We'll meet

6 regularly. If any of the tapes become a part of the

7 decision process, I would review them.

8 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, when's the last time you

9 talked to your task force? Did you talk to them this

10 morning?

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The last time I talked

12 to the task force in our regular meeting was last

13 Wednesday, I believe.

14 QUESTION: Are you updated daily on the results
15 of the task force?

16 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We're getting updates as
17 new information comes in. We're meeting again. Because
18 of the hearing we had yesterday, the weekly meeting is
19 tomorrow.

20 QUESTION: Can you still say that there is no
21 identifiable crime by any covered person on any of the
22 evidence that you've gathered so far?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I can say what we have

24 said with respect -- I can say what we have said in the

25 letter. I can say what we have said in the notification

14

1 to the court.

2 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the President has said that

3 he thought he'd been scrupulous and possibly over-

4 scrupulous in having on communications with you about this

5 or about virtually anything else as to chatting on these

6 things. Have you noticed a lack of communication? Do you
7 think he's been too scrupulous? Do you know what he's
8 talking about when he says there's been no communications?

9 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: For example, I was

10 thinking back. The President and I had a chance to look

11 at what had been done in Boston and talk with Boston

12 officials on youth violence. I feel I have a good

13 opportunity and, as I said yesterday, in any instance in

14 which I want to talk to the President of the United States

15 there is absolutely no problem in my mind over to my

16 ability to do that.

17 I think there is good communication with the

18 White House on substantive issues. I meet regularly with

19 Chuck Ruff, with the President's National Security

20 Adviser, and I don't feel that I have any impairment

21 whatsoever in my ability to discuss with the President

22 matters which should rise to his level.

23 QUESTION: Is he correct, though, when he says

24 he should not discuss this issue with you?

25 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think he should

15

1 discuss the issue of the independent counsel with me and

2 he has not. I think he should feel free to discuss other

3 substantive issues with me.

4 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Attorney General in the

5 past has taken sort of ideological and moral positions on

6 certain kinds of issues, like civil rights and so forth.

7 You have spelled out in your letter to Hyde that buying
8 access in and of itself is not a crime. But do you have a
9 point of view about whether buying access to politicians
10 is a good thing or a bad thing?

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I've tried to do in
12 this investigation is look at the law as it exists and
13 look at the evidence and make determinations. There are
14 situations that I see that I have feelings about, but I
15 think it is important that I try to be as objective as I

16 can and focus on what my area of responsibility is.

17 If at the conclusion of this investigation

18 people are interested in what I might have learned from my

19 review of the whole situation that might be helpful, I

20 would be delighted to share it. But I think I've got to

21 focus on my responsibilities, which are to determine what

22 the evidence is, whether the evidence supports charging

23 somebody, what steps need to be taken to ensure that we,

24 if we charge, get a conviction that stands up in court,

25 and what -- when at any point along the way should the

16

1 Independent Counsel Act be triggered.

2 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, do you think that these

3 hearings provide an opportunity for you to explain, as you

4 want, the extent of the investigation to the committee?

5 In other words, from your standpoint how did the hearing

6 go and how useful was it for you?

7 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I said to the

8 chairman at the outset of the hearing, I frankly find

9 oversight hearings helpful on most occasions, because it

10 gives you a chance to review, and we spent a lot of time

11 reviewing other aspects of the Justice Department as well

12 as the campaign task force and the campaign finance

13 investigation.

14 QUESTION: Then at the end of it, seven hours

15 later --

16 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the most

17 frustrating experiences for a prosecutor when you're

18 talking, not about the administration of the Department or

19 about the efforts of the Department or the policy of the

20 Department, when you get into the area of the law

21 enforcement side of it it is frustrating, because I want

22 to be as open as I can. I want to be able to explain to

23 people what we are doing so that they can understand we're

24 not dragging our feet and that we're really moving ahead.

25 At the same time, as was made clear yesterday, I

1 am limited in what I can say. I can't discuss what the
2 grand jury is doing. I can't really comment on the
3 investigative steps being taken because it's inconsistent
4 with the proper conduct of an investigation. So there is
5 an inevitable dilemma for a prosecutor in that situation.

6 I think the more I have the chance to show the
7 Judiciary Committee what the general framework of what
8 we're trying to accomplish is, what the general framework
9 of the task force is, the better it is for people to

10 understand what's happening. But there is always that

11 dilemma that we face.

12 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on the same topic, in this

13 venue last week you made some rather strong statements

14 that you have to deal with evidence of a crime and that

15 you cannot deal with innuendo or political charges or

16 anything else.

17 You pretty much were trying to make the same

18 case to the House committee yesterday. Do you think you

19 were really getting through or was your message getting

20 across?

21 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know, but I

22 think it's important to reiterate. And I think the

23 questions that were raised -- you have got to have one

24 standard. You have got to make sure that you do not use

25 the power and the authority of the Federal Government to

18

1 pursue rumor and innuendo.

2 Just imagine how you would feel if suddenly
3 tonight there was an agent knocking on your door about a
4 crime that you didn't commit because they decided to
5 pursue something that was just pure unmitigated rumor.
6 You'd be as angry as some of those people were that
7 testified about the IRS.

8 So it is very, very important that we make sure
9 that we pursue appropriate leads. At the same time, we
10 have got to make sure that we treat everybody the same in

11 terms of determining how we conduct an investigation, with
12 the one exception being that there are situations in which
13 the Independent Counsel Act must be invoked. And as I
14 have stressed and as I have indicated in my track record
15 in this job, I'm not afraid to invoke it.

16 QUESTION: You've said you're not afraid to
17 invoke it. In both your letter and your testimony you say
18 more than two. Is there some reason for not being precise
19 on how many times you've sought an independent counsel?

20 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think there are some
21 situations -- again, the court must authorize certain
22 dissemination of information, and I think I am limited by
23 what the court has authorized.

24 QUESTION: Has the court ever denied a request
25 from you for an independent counsel?

19

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again I will ask Burt to
2 check to see what I can do, but -- what I can say. I

3 don't think that the court can, but I will ask Burt to
4 clarify it for you.

5 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I wanted to ask you a
6 question about the tone of your critics, which is unusual,
7 I think, given the relations between a Congress and an
8 Attorney General. What is your reaction to the tone of
9 your critics, like Newt Gingrich, who says that the White
10 House made you look like a fool?

11 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I said, name-calling

12 may be a fact of life in politics. It's something that I
13
14 try not to engage in. I always welcome constructive and
15
16 thoughtful ideas.

17 I thought yesterday, for example, Chairman Hyde
18
19 was just a great gentleman. I have admired him a great
20
21 deal and I thought he conducted a very thoughtful hearing
22
23 yesterday. That's the type of tone that I think is so
24
25 important as we review some very critical issues.

26 It was interesting to sit there yesterday and

21 think that at the heart of this hearing was the whole

22 democratic process, how we finance an elected government,

23 how we conduct investigations that protect the innocent,

24 protect the innocent from abuses while at the same time

25 pursuing the guilty in an appropriate and fair way, how do

20

1 we give confidence to the American people that we're doing

2 it right while at the same time trying to do it the right

3 way in the professional conduct of an investigation.

4 I thought Chairman Hyde set the tone that should
5 exist in this whole undertaking. He said some rather
6 harsh things to me, but he said it in his gracious,
7 inimitable and gentlemanly way. He's my model.

8 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, do you feel personally
9 responsible, and professionally, to guide this Nation's
10 government to a just resolution in this particular
11 election financing matter, and how are you bearing this
12 responsibility?

13 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I get a good night's
14 sleep, get three square meals a day, I prepare for the
15 hearings, and I continue to pursue the other issues at the
16 Justice Department, and I try to do the best job I can.

17 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, speaking of things you may
18 have said yesterday, you did say yesterday, what with the
19 latest turn of events and now that you know who you're up
20 against, how do you think Florida will do in the World
21 Series?

22 (Laughter.)

23 QUESTION: With Hernandez scheduled to pitch the

24 first game, how do you think that will do with U.S.-Cuban

25 relations?

21

1 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm so proud of the

2 Marlins, but I have some Cleveland Indians fans who are

3 very strong Cleveland Indians fans sitting around me, so I

4 better be careful.

5 QUESTION: If you go to any of the games, can we

6 go with you?

7 (Laughter.)

8 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I really am proud of the

9 Marlins, to be such a young team and to come in as a wild

10 card team, I think. And to have watched Hernandez pitch

11 that game, that was really something.

12 I won't comment on the other.

13 QUESTION: So you do sometimes watch television?

14 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I watch ballgames.

15 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you've often said that you
16 will make your decisions based on the facts and the law.
17 Are you at that phase of the investigation where you may
18 have to separate the facts from the law. For instance, on
19 the law thing, the Justice Department has never enforced
20 607 in these instances, in such cases, so you don't have
21 to deal so much with the facts, and would that affect
22 whether or not you interview somebody like the President?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, what we try to do

24 -- and I can't discuss the pending investigations -- but

25 one of the issues that we have to address is the law as

22

1 applied to the facts. And I don't think you can really

2 distinguish those two factors.

3 Under the Independent Counsel Act, one of the

4 issues that we have to address is what has been the

5 Department's practice with respect to such issues, and

6 that's one of the issues that is addressed in the

7 preliminary investigation phase.

8 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, because the law hasn't been

9 prosecuted before, is there a reluctance, is there any

10 trepidation on the Department's part, that any prosecution

11 you go forward with is in essence creating precedent, that

12 there is -- that you in essence are creating a new basis

13 for future prosecutions?

14 Is there any reluctance, any fear to move

15 forward that way?

16 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There is no fear to move

17 forward based on the evidence and the law, and that's what

18 we are in the process of trying to do.

19 QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you made a reference to the

20 fact that you could go home to Miami if you didn't have

21 this job. But do you really feel like your job is in any

22 way in jeopardy because of this?

23 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the things that

24 I've always said is that I take this job a day at a time.

25 It is a privilege to hold the job and I don't think

23

1 anybody should ever think that they have an entitlement to

2 it. So from my point of view, I serve and I do the best

3 job I can while I serve, and then when I don't, am no

4 longer serving, as my sister says: You can come home and

5 park the boat on the beach.

6 Thank you very much.

7 (Whereupon, at 9:54 a.m., the press conference

8 was adjourned.)

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

