



**PRESS CONFERENCE**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO**

**Thursday, November 20, 1997**

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**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**10TH & CONSTITUTION AVENUE, N.W.**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20530**

**PRESS CONFERENCE**

(9:30 a.m.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: -- has benefited the Department of Justice. Canadian authorities have evidenced the same interest.

On two occasions when I have been in Canada we had raised the issue because we realized that it will not stop at borders, and I think it is very important to work with Canadian authorities and with others to take steps to prevent it wherever possible and to make sure that we prosecute whenever possible.

QUESTION: A figure of \$40 billion a year has been (inaudible) to the telemarketing scams. Do we know how much of this is cross-border, or --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I don't, but I will let Bert give you any information that we have available.

QUESTION: On the (inaudible) article from last Friday you were quoted as saying that -- this is not quoted, but it was reported that you were livid at the FBI foul-up and that you apologized to Fred Thompson a couple of days later for failing to

disclose the information that was germane to the Senate hearings. Is that accurate reporting?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I haven't been livid in a long time.

QUESTION: You apologized --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I called -- Director Freeh asked to brief Senator Thompson first and then asked -- I asked to call him and we talked, and I told him of my concern and regretted the fact that it had not been made available to him earlier, and also indicated what steps we were taking with respect to making sure it didn't happen again.

QUESTION: Were you embarrassed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think embarrassed is the word. I think any time something should have been done that isn't done I'm concerned and I want to get to the bottom of it and figure out what we can do to prevent it from happening again.

QUESTION: When and how did you first become aware of this problem?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I received a call from Craig Isko of our staff indicating that he was going to be briefed by the FBI and then I subsequently talked to Director Freeh.

QUESTION: When was that, ma'am?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'll ask Bert to get you the specific date. I don't have it right off the top of my head.

QUESTION: This sounds like some of the same problems that go back to the Ames case where national security information is supposed to be shared with the criminal side, and that's not getting done. Why weren't those problems getting fixed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What is very important when you look at foreign counterintelligence information is you've got to do everything you can to protect sources and methods. You've got to be very careful in the utilization of the information, and it's got to be done carefully.

Again, we are taking steps to review what has been done to see what systems

were not in place that could have prevented it.

QUESTION: (Unintelligible) material that was in the files.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What we're trying to do is how, what happened, because I don't want to prejudge it. I want to find out what happened, why it wasn't done, and what steps could have been taken to have prevented it, what systems were not in place.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, based also on that story, do you think it was fair for a senior Government official to anonymously label a person as a foreign agent based on raw FBI intelligence data?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I really cannot comment, other than to say that it is very important that classified information not be discussed.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on that point, the attorney for Maria Shaw says that her client was done an injustice by this, and that in the interests of justice shouldn't there be some effort to declare whether she is or is not doing the bidding of some foreign agent?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the pending matter.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, this is an issue of questions being raised about somebody's patriotism which were certainly part of the story. That is, the information was described as raw, third-hand, uncorroborated data which raised questions about whether she was an agent.

Forgetting for a moment the legal issue, just as sort of a moral question, are you concerned that this woman has essentially been accused of being a spy based on information which was described as raw?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is important not to comment prematurely until all the information is available, and we would comment when it would be appropriate.

QUESTION: Are you going to do that at some point in time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You usually comment at some point in time.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Chinese, Mr. Chi Cheng, the foreign minister, told me that their Government was not involved in meddling in internal affairs of this country, in fact that we were meddling in their internal affairs, and yet there is plenty of smoke, according to this article and other sources, that the Chinese are, indeed, meddling. Is this kind of suspect to you, ma'am?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the important points to remember in all of this is that we don't respond to smoke. That's the reason it is important that comments not be made prematurely about a matter, that information not be released, that the investigations underway be conducted in an appropriate manner with due regard to everybody's rights, and that we pursue it to where the evidence takes us, and that's what I'm going to try to do.

QUESTION: And can you comment on the last paragraph of this article that says the FBI obtained intelligence showing that the Ministry of State Security in Beijing boasted that it had successfully thwarted the congressional inquiry of Mr. Thompson's committee?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I have made it a practice not to comment on these matters, because I don't want to do anything that would prejudice the case or inappropriately release information.

QUESTION: Do you have any concerns that information that was provided to the committee was misinterpreted or misreported?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on any reporting because that would be to comment on the evidence, and I think it is very important for me to pursue this matter in the right way, following the leads and developing the information and taking appropriate action based on a full and complete investigation.

QUESTION: Have you had any subsequent discussions with the committee about the information in an effort to clarify exactly what is -- in an effort at clarification?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have again tried to make clear to the committee what the information was, and we are going to do everything we can to pursue this information and to continue to advise the committee consistent with our obligations.

QUESTION: Do you express any concern about leaks from the committee of classified information?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am concerned when any -- and when you say leaks from the committee, you jump to conclusions. I'm concerned about leaks from any source of information that should not be released, either because it is classified information, or because it would be inappropriate to comment on a pending investigation.

QUESTION: Isn't it obvious the leak for that story came from the committee?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment and would not jump to conclusions about any matter.

QUESTION: Have you asked for a leak investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are reviewing everything that we can to see what the appropriate process would be.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, would you help us understand what provoked the Inspector General's review and the other steps you have taken, without commenting on the information or the sources and methods by which it was gathered? Is it the amount of information, its significance to this inquiry, the manner in which it was handled -- I mean, can you give us some sense of what it is that has provoked this?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I want to do is again look at the situation. It is a very difficult issue, to figure out what should -- how you should use intelligence information, foreign counterintelligence information, how you properly protect sources and methods, how you use that appropriately in criminal investigations, and how you make sure that the two investigative aspects of it meet in an appropriate way.

Sometimes this appears not to have happened, and I want to look at it to make sure that we have systems in place that, to the extent humanly possible, will permit an appropriate exchange of information.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if we could shift to the Secretary Babbitt matter for a moment, when you notified the court that you were going beyond 30 days, the language in that notification was different from the language in the notification regarding Vice President Gore and the President. You didn't talk about the pressure of time, and not being able to settle it in 30 days. I wonder, is there a substantial difference between those applications, then?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My understanding is that I have to have the court's

approval for releasing information, and if I were to comment on it I think that that would really go to what I can comment on and not, so I think it better that I not.

QUESTION: But on their face they were different. Was that designed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Chinese judicial minister. Could you characterize the meetings, and were you satisfied with the information that you obtained?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think the meetings were a first step towards building a relationship where we can cooperate together in the exchange of information in mutual legal assistance settings. I think it helped us to understand the differences in terms of how we do things, and we, I think, could characterize it as a first step.

QUESTION: On the assisted suicide issue in Oregon, have you spoken yet with the Administrator Constantine about that issue?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No. We're still reviewing that.

QUESTION: We've got a week to go until Thanksgiving. Do you anticipate that your Department's review will be concluded before Thanksgiving?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't know. I want it done as soon as possible, consistent with a thorough, complete review of the issue.

QUESTION: Did you not want to talk to Mr. Constantine and tell him that it would probably be a good idea if components didn't get out in front of the Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He knows how I feel.

QUESTION: How do you know that he knows how you feel if you haven't spoken with him?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I know.

QUESTION: Are you satisfied at this point that you have enough information to make a decision about the independent counsel question regarding the President

and the Vice President?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One doesn't know what one will know on December 2, so one doesn't know whether one will have enough information.

QUESTION: Is the investigation substantially complete in your opinion?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, would you hope that President Clinton would make a recess appointment of Bill Lann Lee to the head of the Civil Rights Division?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it's important for us to explore every way that it would be possible for the Senate to vote on Mr. Lee's confirmation.

He would make a splendid Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. He is experienced. He is experienced in the enforcement of the civil rights laws, and I'm very hopeful that we can work out some process whereby the whole Senate can vote.

QUESTION: So that sounds like no.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I didn't comment on the recess appointment. I'm trying to figure out how we look at it, see if we can work together to get the whole Senate to vote so that he may have the opportunity to serve.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) recess appointment at the White House, even though others over there and over here say it will really wreck congressional relations. What would be your recommendation on a recess appointment?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't -- what I would really like to do is see where we're at, what can be done to get a full vote of the Senate on an issue that is obviously of concern to many people, and an important issue, an issue involving a man with extraordinary experience who believes as the President does, who ought to be able to serve the President as a member of the Justice Department.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) at the White House that you favor a tactic pursuing a full Senate vote?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think everybody, if we could get a full Senate vote, would like to get a full Senate vote, but I think we've got to look at all our options and we will continue to do so.

QUESTION: If there's a recess appointment, technically does that rule out the possibility of a parallel or subsequent nomination?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I indicated, we're reviewing all aspects of the issue to see just what our alternatives are.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if I could jump back to the Canadian telemarketing fraud for a second, the problem that I heard from both Canadian and American authorities was that the sentencing, the punishment in Canada was not significant enough to be much of a deterrent.

I just gave a cursory glance to your report, but I don't really see anything about that in there. Is that something you have encouraged the Canadians to look at?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am not -- that's the first I've heard of that specific issue. Let me have Bert check and see just what experience we've had and what our response would be.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, do you have any update on the Microsoft case? Are you filing something on that today?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I believe we are. I believe today is the day.

QUESTION: Do you have a time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Bert, would you check and let them know?

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, about 2 weeks ago the Congressional Black Caucus held a hearing at which an array, or a panel of retired and active duty black Federal law enforcement officers raised problems in continuing lack of enforcement of EEOC cases, a failure to resolve the outstanding EEOC matters, and charges that officials of the DEA, FBI, and Marshalls Service who have been engaged in racist activities within those services went both unpunished and actually promoted in many cases.

Eric Holder and other Federal officials were at the hearing, and I wonder whether you have had a chance to discuss these issues with Eric Holder, and whether you've discussed any intentions or review of policy that you might implement in regard to this, or what sort of follow-up to this has been under discussion.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes. Mr. Holder briefed me when he returned from the hearing, pointed out that some of these matters were some years old and preceded this administration, but that there were concerns expressed about activities that have arisen in the last 4 years, and we agreed that he would pursue these and report back to me, and I know we'll report back to the Congressional Black Caucus.

QUESTION: Do you have a time frame for that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We'd like it to be done as soon as possible, but again, consistent with thoroughness.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the vacancy in the Civil Rights Division, does it hurt the Department's ability to do what you want to do in that area?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have been so proud of the people, Isobel Pimsler, the other people in the Civil Rights Division, who carry on and it really is impressive to see people who are dedicated to appropriate enforcement of the civil rights laws carry on, pursue cases, develop information, address issues such as the Hate Crimes Conference.

So much of that involved people from the Civil Rights Division, and I think those who attended that Hate Crimes Conference were impressed by the background, by the thought that had gone into it, and by our plans for the future, but there is no question that getting Bill Lee confirmed would bring a tremendous new dimension to the division.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, regarding Senator McDermott, what do you think of the argument that the Speech and Debate Clause of the Constitution protects his staffers from having to testify before a grand jury?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I have a question on the -- you've been asked this a number of times before, but on the crime rate, declining crime rate, several recently released reports indicate the crime rate continues to go down. What do you attribute that to, and how difficult is it going to be to continue that decline in the future?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, first of all, let me address the issue of how difficult will it be to continue the decline.

As a prosecutor in Miami for 15 years, I saw crime rates go up and down. One of the things that I hope we can all do in this country is continue to focus on crime in a thoughtful, bipartisan way based on common-sense analysis of what has worked and what hasn't worked.

I think we tend, when crime rates go down, to forget about the problem and not to focus on it, and not to continue to build the infrastructures within communities that are so important to addressing the problem of crime, but to address some of the issues, I think clearly the addition of community police officers to the streets through the President's promise to put community police officers on the streets of America has been important.

I think it's been important to make sure that we have enough jails to house people who deserve to be in jail for a long time. I think that incapacitates them, and I think that is productive, but I think it is also important to focus on prevention, and I have been so impressed with what communities around the country have done to develop programs that give kids a positive alternative and a positive future.

One of the issues that has been highlighted in these last 6 years is the whole issue of violence against women and domestic violence, and I think the focus on that by police, by prosecutors, by courts, and by the medical community has been a factor. I think a focus on drug violence in the antiviolence initiative has helped reduce crime.

I think there are so many different features and factors to it. One point that has been raised on some occasions is the aging of the crack market may be another factor. It may be that enough people have realized how dangerous crack is so that the second generation coming along has just rejected crack, and the crack markets.

I don't know that, but I think one of the features that we have got to continue to focus on is guns. We've got to make sure that we work with State and local prosecutors to ensure that gun cases are appropriately prosecuted, because it is guns that have been the factor in the killing.

We've just got to continue to look in a common sense way, without a lot of rhetoric, about what works. We've got to look at crime as you would look at an epidemic, and take steps to stop it, and then, just as we have done with so many epidemics, make sure it doesn't recur again.

In the medical world we do it with vaccinations and proper health care and

proper -- improving sanitary conditions. I think in the world of crime we can do it with proper prevention steps, with effective law enforcement, and I just hope that the message gets out.

Let's not be satisfied with what we've done. Let's continue to try harder, with the President's effort to put 100,000 police officers on the streets, to make sure that we've got programs in place that can deal with guns, that we continue his efforts in terms of violence against women, both in terms of protection programs, prosecution programs, and public prevention programs.

QUESTION: If there was information, counterintelligence information that the FBI believed it was credible that certain individuals were foreign agents, or doing the bidding of foreign agents, shouldn't that information be communicated to senior political leaders so they do not associate with those individuals?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: This is one of the processes that we're looking at to make sure -- and I really can't comment on that, other than to say that such situations have occurred in the past, and we want to make sure not only that the information is identified, but that where it is appropriate to brief House and Senate Committees or the National Security Council, that that is done, and done in a timely way.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, are you encouraging, or have you encouraged Senator Thompson and other Senators on the Governmental Affairs Committee to renew the charter to continue the investigation, in view of this particular and other setbacks in their investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I have told Senator Thompson and Senator Glenn is that however they want to proceed, we want to try to work with them, recognizing that there is a difference in our functions.

They have an oversight function in which material must be made public. We have a function that requires that we follow leads, that to disclose those leads prematurely risks impacting the investigation adversely, and our goal is to investigate, to develop evidence, if the evidence is sufficient, to prosecute.

Recognizing that there is a tension between those two functions, we still want to try to do everything we can, consistent with those different responsibilities, to cooperate.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, some months ago the campaign finance task force began to investigate allegations against Representative Burton of Indiana. Can you tell

us if Representative Burton has been cleared in this investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I can't comment.

QUESTION: Can you tell us, if this investigation does find that these allegations are not substantial, or are not credible, that he will be publicly cleared?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I want to make sure that nobody is inappropriately castigated by anything that's done. That's the reason I commented earlier about, in a premature disclosure of information, and that's the reason it is so important for our role to be one that pursues the evidence, that doesn't comment, that follows the leads, takes them where they will -- wherever they will take us.

If they take us to concluding that a person has done nothing wrong, then that should, I think, be made clear. Where there is information that would lead to prosecution, we should follow that.

QUESTION: Are you confident that no one at the Justice Department or at the FBI was responsible for the premature disclosure of this classified information out of last week's briefing?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment on who might be responsible for it. I just think it is wrong to prematurely disclose information, and we need to take appropriate steps.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, it's not the usual thing for the Department to let it be known when subjects of an investigation have been cleared. You do it every now and then in rare circumstances. Do you think that the campaign finance investigation is one of those circumstances where you would let it be known that certain prominent people have been cleared as the investigation goes along?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the points that you -- you have different gradations. You have situations where people -- where the evidence is sufficient to prosecute, and you prosecute. You have other situations where the evidence is insufficient either to say that the person should be prosecuted or that he or she did not do what it is said that they did, and in that situation it is difficult to clear.

Where there is a clear situation, then it may be appropriate to comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, is there anyone whose name has been raised in connection with this campaign finance investigation who has been officially cleared by the Department?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I don't think I can comment at this particular point, but I will ask Bert at any point that it would be appropriate we would.

QUESTION: To Mexico. I wanted to ask if you had heard of the allegations by the former drug czar Mr. General Gutierrez Reboyo, that Mr. Aben Amescua Contrarez and his family, the meth gang, had been associated closely with Zedillo, President Zedillo's family. Have you heard of this accusation, and do you find any concern about it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I read it in the paper.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything about your conference last week with the Mexican officials that were here, especially with regard to money laundering? Are they making any progress about the money laundering in Mexico?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I can't comment with respect to the progress, but we had a good meeting both with Mr. Madrazo and with Foreign Minister Gedilla, and we are going to be following up on a number of issues with them.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if we can get back to Maria Shaw for a minute, in this particular story, raw FBI information was used to kind of label her a foreign agent. Earlier this week there were other reports that she's about to be indicted.

What's going on here? I mean, before people are even charged with something, they're pretty much being nailed. Do you see any type of political pattern in what's going on? Are there agendas within the Department, or within the FBI?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not comment. You all have speculated on who might have released the information. Whoever it is, I don't think it was appropriate to release it, and I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on it.

QUESTION: Can you comment on the appropriateness of somebody (inaudible)?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I just did.

QUESTION: Can you give your assessment of the threat concerning the Mexican drug cartels at this particular point?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I didn't hear the first part of the question, sir.

QUESTION: Could you give me your assessment of the threat posed by the Mexican drug cartels at this particular point?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think President Zedillo has summed it up by saying it is one of the most important national security threats in Mexico, and I think it is a matter of very serious concern, and we look forward to continuing to work with Attorney General Madrazo, with Foreign Minister Gedilla, with Mexican authorities in addressing this issue in an appropriate way, as it impacts our side of the border.

Thank you.

VOICES: Thank you, Ms. Reno.

(Whereupon, at 10:00 a.m., the press conference ended.)