



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

PRESS CONFERENCE

THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 1998

3:30 p.m.

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(3:30 p.m.)

GENERAL RENO: I am here to be accountable to the American people and to explain why I did not turn over memos to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee.

Director Freeh and Mr. Lobella had explained to the committee on Tuesday that release of the memos to the committee would be damaging to the campaign finance investigation.

Mr. Lobella said, the last thing in the world I would ever want is that this memo be disclosed. This, in my judgment, would be devastating to the investigation of the men and women of the task force.

I determined that I could not turn over the memos to the committee. However, I offered everything short of giving the committee grand jury information and information which would damage the investigation. Just this morning, I talked with Chairman Burton and offered to attend a public hearing with all the members present to brief the committee on the legal rationale set forth in the memo.

I explained to Chairman Burton that I had made no decision on these recommendations yet. I still have an open mind. I will make my decision, and I will explain it.

But to ask for a document I am reviewing while I have still not made a decision is a form of political tampering that no prosecutor in America can accept. the Department of Justice cannot perform its statutory and constitutional duty if it is required to turn over memos, the release of

which would provide criminals, targets, and defense lawyers with a road map to our investigations.

The Department cannot do its duty if it is subjected to a process that can only shake public confidence in our ability to make law enforcement decisions free of political pressure, and it cannot perform the way it should if required to submit internal memoranda to political scrutiny in a manner that can only squelch candid, honest, open advice.

Despite our efforts, the committee has voted to cite me for contempt. I regret that. I sincerely hope that the Department can reach agreement with the committee that will permit it to perform its oversight duties while not undermining the ability of the executive branch to discharge its statutory and constitutional duty.

We will try our level best to see that an accommodation is reached, but I simply have to draw the line and stand up for what I believe to be a very important principle: prosecution in America must be free of political influence.

QUESTION: -- there is room now for a real compromise?

GENERAL RENO: As I have indicated, we have offered the commit any number of ideas about how we could reach an accommodation that permitted the Congress to exercise its oversight function and permitted us to conduct the investigation the right way. We will continue in that effort in every way possible.

QUESTION: (inaudible)

GENERAL RENO: Well, however its done, I would think that when you have such an extraordinary form of Government as ours that relies on people of good faith and goodwill who have the best interests of the Constitution and this country at heart, then I think we will find that.

QUESTION: Congressman Burton's people say that at a minimum maybe something, something in writing from the Justice Department, if not the memos themselves.

Is there some reason that you would not be willing to put a summary of some kind in writing?

GENERAL RENO: What we offered is to have a public hearing in which we would explain the legal rationale of the memorandums and, as long as it did not impact on the criminal investigation, if transcripts were taken of that, and we would be happy to have that memorialized.

QUESTION: Would you like to summarize that legal rationale for us now?

GENERAL RENO: What I explained, and have explained all along, we're in the process of reviewing it. I don't know what decision I'm going to make. I don't know whether I'm going to ask for an independent counsel or not.

I don't want to do anything that will prejudice -- if I determine to seek an independent counsel, I don't want to do anything that would prejudice the independent counsel or in any way violate the Independent Counsel Act.

QUESTION: So you're saying that this hearing that you offer would only come after you reach your decision?

GENERAL RENO: That's correct.

QUESTION: Members of the committee (inaudible) suggest that you or members of your staff leaked the Freeh and Lobello memo.

GENERAL RENO: Considering the pain it's caused me, that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of.

Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at 3:36 p.m., the press conference ended.)