



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL

Friday, September 25, 1998

10:00 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(10:00 a.m.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much for adjusting your schedule.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I hate to begin with old business.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That's okay.

QUESTION: And this is getting old. OPR has been poised for many months now to begin a review of some rather serious ethics complaints against Judge Starr. Is that review still not begun?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As you know, the court is considering that. And we are deferring to the court.

QUESTION: So the answer is yes, it has not begun?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That is correct.

QUESTION: Thank you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you.

QUESTION: In one of the documents released this week were a lot of statements that Monica Lewinsky gave the FBI, one of which was that she had lied when she told Linda Tripp that she was demanding that Vernon Jordan find her a job in exchange for her signing a false affidavit. If Ms. Lewinsky's current statement is accurate, doesn't that mean that your whole referral to Judge Starr was based on a lie? Is there any chagrin over here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment, because the matter is obviously still pending.

QUESTION: Is there any movement yet on getting involved on the White House side with regard to impeachment proceedings? Has DOJ got -- is there any -- has the ball moved to step forward yet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: When you say involved on the White House side, what I have indicated is that the Office of Legal Counsel will review issues to determine whether the Justice Department should address issues that affect the institution of the presidency, the traditions, the processes, the procedures that affect the office the presidency. And as those issues arise, we will address them.

QUESTION: No progress, then, that you can report at this time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, we are continuing to review all possibilities. But as these issues may or may not arise, we will consider them.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, on that same subject, is part of what the Department is doing trying to show some historical definition of high crimes and misdemeanors?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I have been briefed and as OLC is looking at it, it is to look at the range of issues that might affect the institution and the office of the presidency.

QUESTION: Including that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Any of those issues would -- might be relevant. But it would depend on how the issues are framed.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, could I ask you a question about the bailout that had to happen this past week for an outfit called Longterm Capital Management? Is there anything in that and its difficulties that is something for the Justice Department to look into, of whatever sort you may need?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not been advised of any issues so far.

QUESTION: There are independent reports on a number of developments on the terrorism front in recent days, including events in Uganda, Germany and elsewhere. Can you comment on any of the developments specifically? And if not, could you make any observations about how the war on terrorism is going in general?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I obviously cannot comment on any of the pending matters except to say that the people involved, the FBI, the intelligence community, the lawyers who have been working on it, and a number of foreign governments have just been excellent in their undertakings. It has been a classic example of what happens when people work together, when governments work with each other, and I think we have seen some examples that will help guide us for the future should, God forbid, these events recur.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, has the Department decided whether to appeal the latest ruling in the Maria Hsia campaign finance case? And what do you expect? Do you expect the trial to go forward soon on that, or will that be delayed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I expect to hear shortly what the recommendation is on that.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I was just going to follow up on the earlier question on Longterm Capital. You indicated that you have not been advised of any issues yet. Is this being looked into? Is someone looking into it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm not aware that anybody is. I will check with Bert, and ask him to keep you advised as to any action taken by the Department that would be appropriate for public disclosure.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, do you know the members of Congress have asked the Justice Department to investigate possible leaks by the White House regarding members of the Judiciary Committee? Has the Justice Department, you and/or Director Freeh, come to any conclusion about whether there is anything actually worth investigating here?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not heard from Director Freeh with respect to any conclusions. And, to my knowledge, we have not.

QUESTION: Have you seen anything that would indicate that the story, particularly about Chairman Hyde, originated at the White House or anywhere other than the person who gave the story to Salon magazine?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, I would not comment, since the matter is under review. And I do not think it would be appropriate for me to comment.

QUESTION: What possibly might the law be that would have been violated? I mean when the

FBI, when the Justice Department look at matters, they have to have some law in mind that might have been violated.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are looking at that, and we want to make sure that we carefully review it.

QUESTION: Didn't Director Freeh cite the specific part of the Code, I think having to do with intimidation of Congress or intimidation of --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He may have. He has not advised me yet.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the House Ethics Committee put out a memo earlier this month that said that it was okay for members of Congress to solicit campaign contributions from each other in Federal buildings, which was an issue obviously earlier with the President and Vice President. Do you have any comment about that, about whether that is okay and legal under the criminal law?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not seen that, so I should take a look at it first before I comment.

QUESTION: Attorney General, in Salt Lake yesterday, you indicated that plans for 100,000 new youth counselors were moving forward, but were not yet a done deal, I think.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, no. Yesterday I attended an excellent conference that the United States Conference of Mayors had arranged. There were mayors, police chiefs, parks and recreation specialists, and human resource specialists there. And it was one of the best meetings that I have been to.

One of the suggestions made, and it was just a brainstorming idea of what people needed most, was a statement by a police chief that he did not need more policemen as much as he needed school counselors and people who could support and provide counseling for children who were troubled and who were faced with the prospects of growing up in a difficult time when children are more unsupervised than they have been at most points in history.

I told them that we would explore it. And I said I had already started exploring it. But it has -- I need to talk to Secretary Reilly and to others to see what, if anything, we can do in this regard.

It was exciting, and you all have had to listen to me on this subject, but sometimes you ask the questions and --

QUESTION: I didn't quite get to my question -

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, I will stay here until you get to your question.

But I just wanted to point out, when I first came to Washington, people looked at me kind of like what is the Attorney General talking about these issues for, about prevention. Yesterday, I heard from mayors and police chiefs about what they are now doing across the country.

Prevention and intervention programs are working. They have been proven successful. And there is so much that we can do to build on it. The excitement in that room was just contagious. And I was very encouraged by it. So thank you for letting me do that.

QUESTION: Is there a timetable for the plan?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: There is really no plan. The idea came out yesterday. I told my secretary this morning that I wanted to talk to him today if I possibly could.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, during that discussion with mayors yesterday, did you get a chance to talk with the Mayor of Denver? He is in the news somewhat these days, I believe, because of an ordinance and an NRA convention that is coming into town.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I talked with the Mayor of Denver. And I talked with the other representatives from Denver. But that subject did not come up.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, I have a baseball question for last. But right now, what about --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Do you want to ask me about the hurricane?

QUESTION: That would be very relevant, wouldn't it, very much of interest to you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I am watching it very closely. You realize, when you have something like that, you realize how people must feel. And just thinking back to Andrew, I am thinking a lot about the Keys. And it is just a ribbon of rocky islands, 180 miles long. And so we should be thinking about them and wishing them well.

QUESTION: Those folks on the Keys are in some peril. For instance, do you have any friends out there?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes.

QUESTION: What about baseball? We have a tie, a dead heat in the homerun derby, with Manny and Mark both having the same number of runs. It looks very much like your desire

that they should tie is about to come to past.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, I think what has been the greatest victory of all has been their sportsmanship. And the sportsmanship of the American people who bring the balls back. For a Nation that is supposed to be so concerned about material things, for a game that has seen ticket prices skyrocket and salaries skyrocket, to see these two men use some of their money to help others, to see people bring the balls back without asking for anything, really gives us a whole new dimension to these days.

QUESTION: Well, this is another one on the Starr report and the possible impeachment process in the House, et cetera. Ma'am, do you have any comment whatsoever about whether it is necessary now for justice to be done, for the truth to come out, that the Starr report be examined very carefully in due process; is that one way that Mr. Clinton can be exonerated if exoneration is due and held accountable if that is the case?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You asked if justice should be done, and I think all Americans would ask that justice be done.

Thank you.

VOICES: Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at 10:14 a.m., the press conference concluded.)