



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Press Conference

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thursday, January 7, 1999

9:30 a.m.

P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:30 a.m.)

QUESTION: Happy New Year.

QUESTION: Happy New Year.

QUESTION: Is this going to be a whole, new year, you're going to give us actual information now and answer all our questions this new year, right?

QUESTION: Yes.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Boy, you have an optimistic view of the future.

QUESTION: Well, it's a new year.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm going to try to give you as much information as I can.

QUESTION: All right.

QUESTION: And do "what if's"?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can we start off with a "what if"?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You can always start off with anything you'd like. I may not answer it.

QUESTION: Now, the Justice Department has researched to see if there's anything, as an institution, it should do to protect the institution of the presidency during the impeachment process. It was poised, so to speak, to give this information to the judiciary committee or to the House if it asked, or to anybody in Congress. If the White House should ask you for a written opinion of what an impeachable offense is, would you supply that written opinion for use during the impeachment trial?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I do not do "what if's." It depends on the circumstances. And again, what we did was to go back, through Republican and Democratic administrations, to see what opinions have written in the Office of Legal Counsel that would apply in order to ensure that they were available should people request them.

QUESTION: Ma'am, is the Justice Department to be involved in any way that you can enumerate in the trial in the Senate?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That would depend on the Senate.

QUESTION: Has the Justice Department been asked to be involved?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Not to my knowledge.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, the Justice Department agreement into the Laborers International Union expires at the end of this month. Are you going to extend that agreement? And if so, how come? It's been four years now. Have they finished the cleanup yet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: This afternoon an announcement will be made that the agreement will be extended. And that is to make sure that we continue to do everything we can to ensure the appropriate operation of the Union.

QUESTION: Can you say anything about what the circumstances of why the extension?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it will speak for itself, this afternoon.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, this is simple.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Please, be patient.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, let's go back to some of our age-old --. Have you yet reached any conclusions in your continuing, ongoing review of questions raised about Independent Counsel Starr's conduct? Have you started an actual investigation, or are you still in the review stage?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

QUESTION: In the past, you've told us that you were reviewing the question. Can you repeat that now?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would just not comment.

QUESTION: In the past, you've said that some allegations had been dismissed, while you were inquiring of the OIC about others. Does that still stand?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It still stands that some have been dismissed.

QUESTION: But nothing on whether --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And I won't comment with respect to any remaining matter.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, have you had some recent discussions with the President regarding the Pollard case? And what conclusions have you made?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not had a discussion with the President. We expect to present to Mr. Ruff, as he requested, the Justice Department's position

by January the 11th.

QUESTION: Has that reached your desk yet?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, it has not.

QUESTION: In the review of certain elements in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, any progress on that front or --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Again, it is a pending matter. And I know how frustrated you all get when I say that's a pending prosecution or a pending investigation or a pending matter and I can't comment. But if the investigation involved you, you wouldn't like it out in headlines and you wouldn't think that that would be a very good way of conducting the investigation. So I really should not comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, what are your priorities this year?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the things -- I just have a real goal to do everything I can, consistent with the Constitution, consistent with individual rights, to eliminate the culture of violence in this country. Crime is down for a variety of reasons. Some of it is demographics, some community policing; State and locals are doing so much. But if we continue this effort, rather than becoming complacent, I think we can make a real difference.

As a prosecutor in Miami, when the crime rate went down, people got interested in other things and they forgot about crime. If we can all continue to work together, both in terms of punishment and prevention programs that can make sense, we can truly make a difference.

And one of the initiatives that we're undertaking this year, that I think can be extremely beneficial, is to develop the best possible means of analyzing a community or a region's crime problems. Is it drug gangs? Is it youth gangs? Is it domestic violence? What is involved, and how can we best help State, Federal and local law enforcement work together to strategically and then tactically address each issue?

When the Federal Government comes in to share information, rather than taking over cases, we can perhaps do more than to prosecute the case. But I want to do everything I can both in terms of the law enforcement initiatives and the prevention initiatives aimed at children that I can, to really eliminate this culture of violence. So instead of being a blip on the screen for six years, it will continue

to go down, and stay down.

Obviously another priority that I have is bringing Federal law enforcement into the 21st century, equipped to deal with crime as a truly international problem. With cyber tools and cyber facilities at everybody's fingertips, crooks can use it, bad guys can use it, and we're going to have to be prepared to deal with this issue on an international basis.

The technology of law enforcement is another priority. How do we use the technology of today as an effective tool for law enforcement that does not intrude on people's individual rights? How do we use it to match wits with the bad guys? How do we use it to assimilate information and to find information in an immediate form that can help us solve a crime immediately?

It is so fascinating to think of what will happen 10 years from now, when a police officer can sit in his car, put a fingerprint match into the car, have the computer match immediately, and know whether we've got the bad guy or not, and to do the same thing with the DNA sample.

These are just issues that are on the horizon now. Think of what's there, that we've never dreamed of 10 years ago, that will be available to us 10 years from now. I want to make sure that law enforcement uses these tools in the wisest way possible.

We have an opportunity -- Chief Ramsey has written to Eric Holder, the Deputy Attorney General, and I have just received a letter from Mayor Williams in support of Chief Ramsey's request, that we provide assistance to address the use of deadly force on the part of the D.C. Police. And I've asked Deputy Attorney General Holder to contact Chief Ramsey, and to see that we do everything we can, through both the Civil Rights Division, the National Institute of Justice, and other components of the Department, to assist.

Because I think this is an example of what policing is becoming -- a really professional, excellent institution, dedicated to trying to serve the people, while at the same time protecting them.

QUESTION: So, is it so that the Justice Department will take the issue of Chief Ramsey's, the deadly force issue, and study -- do this study? Is DOJ committed to it? I guess that's what I'm asking.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We're committed to doing everything we can to assist and support Chief Ramsey and the dedicated officers, who are trying to do

the right thing day in and day out, to understand what the best tools are, how we address the issue when it occurs, what we can do to prevent the unjustified use of deadly force. And with Chief Ramsey's positive, forward-looking attitude, I think we can well use the District of Columbia as a model for what could be done in departments across the country.

QUESTION: Yes, ma'am, but has not Chief Ramsey asked the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department to take a role, and has the Justice Department said, yes, we'll help, or do you know that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I just said was that when I heard that we had received a letter last night -- I got it this morning -- and I've already asked Deputy Attorney General Holder to contact Chief Ramsey to see exactly what we can do, both at the Civil Rights Division, the National Institute of Justice and the COPS program, to assist and support in the areas that he addressed in his letter.

QUESTION: Okay. So you have said yes?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, I'm saying yes as much as I possibly can.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Have you already, or has the Civil Rights Division already, started looking at the situation since the Washington Post ran its series on the D.C. deadly use --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I believe they had been reviewing it.

QUESTION: Okay. So, can you say that this is now a full-fledged pattern and practice investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No. I can say exactly what I said. Because I think it is important to address the issues that he raised in his letter. I think it's important for Mr. Holder -- and he will be in the process of talking with both Mr. Lee, in the Civil Rights Division, Jeremy Travis, in the National Institute of Justice, the COPS program, Joe Brandt, to see just what we can do to address the issues that he raises in the most effective manner possible -- enforcement procedures, investigatory procedures, education, training, working with the line officers, to how can you best train officers.

These are some of the issues that we will address. If there are enforcement issues to be undertaken, we will do so with Chief Ramsey in an appropriate

manner.

QUESTION: So, basically, NIJ and the COPS office will be helping them towards the future, where Civil Rights will be looking at whether there's any problems in the past that need to--?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think we sometimes tend to put people in little categories.

QUESTION: That's true.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And I prefer not to. I prefer to think that we will look at what the circumstances are in Washington, both the Civil Rights Division, NIJ and COPS, under Eric Holder's leadership, and see just how we can learn from the past to address the future, and to develop the most effective effort possible that will be in support of the D.C. Police Department.

QUESTION: Outside of this investigation into the use of deadly force. To your knowledge, is this the first time the Police Department has asked for such widespread or comprehensive help in trying to get their force on track, or --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think there have been other instances. I can't bring them to mind, but they have sometimes been in different forms. I can't think of any exactly like this.

QUESTION: Can you give us any guidance, just for planning purposes, on whether or not you'll come out with a decision on the Harold Ickes independent counsel sometime before January 29th?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We want to make an appropriate decision, consistent with everything that needs to be done. And I can't speculate on when that will be.

QUESTION: On the situation in Salt Lake City, there's a number of investigations going on. Some of the top players in that whole thing could ultimately be suspects in this. They've all but admitted that they gave -- well, many would constitute it as bribes -- to the IOC. Does that have any legal significance to you? I mean if they're essentially saying this was the game all along, this is how it's played, as a lawyer, does that have any significance?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As a lawyer, one of the things that I've learned is don't comment about things preliminarily; wait until you have all the facts before

you comment as to what's significant and what's not significant.

QUESTION: Will you be cooperating with other investigations at Justice?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the things that I've always stressed to the components of the Department is that when there are other ongoing investigations where there are other agencies involved, we should work with them in every way possible to make sure that everybody does their job the right way.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, Chief Justice Rehnquist was critical of what he called the increased Federal caseload because of growing federalization of crimes that are covered by State and local laws. What do you make of his comment? And do you feel that Congress and the Justice Department should think carefully before asking for more and tougher penalties for crimes that are already covered?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I read Chief Justice Rehnquist's comments in the paper, he was concerned about the increased federalization through statutes and legislation that made more conduct a Federal crime. What we have tried to do is to make sure that we approached these issues based on principles of Federalism -- what is appropriate for the State to handle, what is appropriate for the Federal Government to handle.

We have tried to work with State and local authorities to do what's in the best interests of the community and to address the issues of who should handle what. As we have reviewed the caseload, the major increase has been in immigration prosecutions, which are clearly Federal in nature. And they represent the great bulk of the significant increase.

QUESTION: But that -- immigration -- is kind of separate, isn't it? I mean he's talking more about carjackings and those kinds of crimes.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That's my point. He's talking about statutes and new legislation that makes something a Federal crime that was not a Federal crime before. We have the responsibility for using those statutes in the wisest way possible.

If there is a carjacking that goes from one district to another or crosses State lines, it may be far more effective, and the Federal Government may have a far greater interest because the matter crosses State lines -- so the Department of Justice can more effectively deal with it than a local prosecutor.

He expressed some concern about child support laws. We don't handle cases that arise within one State. But from my experience as a local prosecutor, I can tell you that one of the most frustrating things is to have the mother with the children in Miami and have the father in another State, and not be able to get at the father in the other State because I do not have jurisdiction.

We try to approach it, again, on what is a Federal matter, because it crosses State lines and the States don't have jurisdiction, and what is a local matter. And I think we've tried to do a good job of making sure that there was a proper allocation of responsibilities based on principles of Federalism.

QUESTION: Do you think his criticism is unwarranted?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: He has long been a principal critic of the federalization of too many crimes. And I think you've got to look at each instance and make a decision. But I think, in terms of how we've used those statutes, I feel comfortable, for the most part, in what we have done.

QUESTION: Speaking of immigration, the INS is going to come out with a report that there are actually turning back a lot more people out of the country this year, partly because there's a lot more room for detention and contained a lot more people as you said. There was some criticism of the treatment of some INS detainees in Miami a short while ago. Are you looking at that at all? I know the President of the American Bar Association has criticized it, and is looking at some other ways of detaining these people other than in local jails -- because apparently that's where the trouble is.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have talked with the American Bar Association. He was referring to a county in north Florida, not in Miami, in his column. And when we spoke yesterday, he told me how impressed he was -- was his words, not mine -- with what the Justice Department was doing to address standards and review -- and processes for review -- of those offenders held in local jails.

We're going to continue that effort, and do everything we can to make sure that when we detain people, they are detained in appropriate circumstances.

QUESTION: Is that incident in northern Florida under investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yes, it is.

QUESTION: When did that come under investigation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'll ask Myron to give you the exact date.

QUESTION: What is the status of any inquiry, overview, into the whole Pinochet case, both the bombing investigation here and any decision about whether you might be helpful in any trial or legal action that would occur in Spain?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are continuing to try to do everything we can to make sure that material that Spain has sought under the mutual legal assistance treaty is made available to Spain, and that we do everything else that we can to cooperate. And we're reviewing that process now.

At the same time, we're reviewing the case that occurred here to see what appropriate steps can be taken there.

QUESTION: And what about the issues of whether Mr. Pinochet could ever be tried in the United States if it should ever come to that? Is that also an issue that's --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: That's what we have under review.

QUESTION: Anything on the situation in Cambodia and the gentleman, the former head of the Khmer Rouge? Is there any movement to try to bring them to justice in the United States, other than an international tribunal?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Let me do this, so that I get you whatever information I can, consistent with what I said earlier. Let me ask Myron check to see just what we can provide you.

QUESTION: Can I just ask you about the announcement you made at the White House earlier this week regarding funding for drug treatment? When you were talking about your priorities earlier, I know that drug courts and those kinds of things have been a priority for you. I guess if I understand you correctly, the key to the announcement was that there will be another \$100 million or so for drug treatment in prisons and prison after-care.

There was some suggestion that that was done to counter the fact that drug treatment is actually declining at the present time. Do you think this is an adequate amount of assistance for this massive problem?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Here is what we were concerned about. We have seen how effective drug treatment can be in the Federal prison system. And governors and mayors -- as evidenced by the representative of the U.S.

Conference of Mayors -- have been frustrated as we see people go to prison for a drug offense, sometimes receive treatment in prison, and then come back out to the community with no program, no after-care or follow-up afterwards whatsoever.

What we are trying to do here, under the President's leadership, is to recognize that you can use a lot of -- you can get a lot of mileage on the carrot and stick approach. And let me give you the example. The drug court is for the first offender, the nonviolent offender, who is first into the system.

This is giving States the opportunity to develop their own drug courts. I think there are some 300 now either on the boards or in operation in the country. And it's a concept that's spreading. And it's the carrot and stick approach. You cooperate with us, you test clean regularly, you work with us in job training and placement, and we'll see that you get off to a fresh, good start. But you mess up, you're going to face more certain sanctions every step of the way.

For somebody who has been in prison three years or five years, who has a drug problem, the Bureau of Prisons has provided drug treatment before they leave the prison. And the Office of Probation Services has been providing after-care programs as a follow-up in some instances.

What we're hopeful that we can do is to develop, with State and local governments, the same response on the back side as we do on the front end of the system. So that as a person leaves prison and goes out into the community, there will be the management, the case, management, the after-care, the supervision that can give them a chance to get off on the right foot.

As I said at the White House the other day, it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever to spend taxpayers' dollars to keep a person with a drug problem in jail for five years, and then send them back to the community, to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got in trouble in the first place, back to their friends, back to the circumstances which causes the problem, without doing anything to intervene, to give them a chance to get off on the right foot upon coming back to the community.

QUESTION: And the amount of the increase that was announced is sufficient in your mind?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think what we can do is build on that. Because we started -- at first, people were a bit dubious about drug courts. And as we put them into effect and as prosecutors came back to their representatives and said,

hey, this is really working, Congress has provided additional monies. And I think that this can -- we can show what we can do and build on that.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, if I can have another try at impeachment. The Office of Legal Counsel normally responds to questions or opinions from the President, or the White House. The Justice Department has been researching the issue of impeachment. Is it reasonable for us to believe that if the White House asks the OLC for a definition, or for the institutional definition or parameters, of an impeachable offense, the OLC could respond in an expeditious manner?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is reasonable to believe that the OLC can respond in an expeditious manner when called upon to do so.

QUESTION: And in this particular instance it could?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, there is no particular instance.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: (off microphone)...It's been reported that Director Freeh -- (off microphone). Is that where you are right now? Is that consistent with what you think at this point in time? I know you --

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Justice Department has been on record in the past. At the present time I am awaiting a report from the Deputy, through the usual process, taking into consideration the FBI and the other Justice Department interests. And I have not received that, as I indicated.

QUESTION: Have you heard from one person in the U.S. Government who believes Pollard should be released?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have not been listening.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Because I am trying to make an informed judgment based on the information available in the Department of Justice.

QUESTION: Did you have a good holiday?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I had a wonderful time, and I hope everybody else

did.

QUESTION: Did you get some rest?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I got some rest. But I went home and scuba dived and sailed and canoed and had a wonderful, wonderful time. I ate too much. I enjoyed my family. My great niece got a piano for Christmas, and it was just wonderful to see the stars in her eyes. And my great nephew was full of himself and it was a great pleasure. So it was a grand time.

QUESTION: Did you pull any vines down?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: How did you know?

QUESTION: You told us you were going to pull vines down.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is so wonderful, when you sometimes wonder what you've accomplished day in and day out, to go out and pull down vines and to have a cabbage palm that had been taken over by vines and is dying, and to pull all the vines away, and just in the week that you're there see the cabbage palm start to grow again.

QUESTION: Is that a metaphor?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I hadn't thought about metaphors, Bev.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you all.

QUESTION: Can you take another question?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Yeah. You still got three minutes.

QUESTION: Sure. The select committee in the House, chaired by Christopher Cox, has been studying Chinese espionage, among other things I think, has a report out -- it's not public. Have you seen this report? And if so, can you comment on it? Can you tell us whether you think it should be made public?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: My hope is -- I have not seen the report -- but my hope is that for any report such as that, that as much of it as possible be made

public, consistent with national security and the interests involved in the pending investigation.

QUESTION: Are you up to date on the theft of information concerning U.S. hydrogen warheads, advanced warheads, by the Chinese out of one of the laboratories that DOE runs?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I would not comment.

QUESTION: Ms. Reno, you said you have not seen the report. Do you know if a copy has been made available to your investigators who are looking into this matter?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I cannot comment on the process with respect to the report until it's clarified what can be released and what can't be released. But I will ask Myron to keep you up to date and advised.

QUESTION: Would you like to see a copy? I do not have one.

(Laughter.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, if you've got one.

QUESTION: But I take it they'll provide you with one.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, ma'am.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You're getting awfully philosophical.

QUESTION: Have a good week.

(Whereupon, at 9:58 a.m., the press conference concluded.)