



**WEEKLY MEDIA BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 9:26 A.M. EDT THURSDAY, MAY 6, 1999**

Q Ms. Reno, I know this is going to come as a great shock, some Republicans were saying means things about the department yesterday. Specifically, they said that DOJ and FBI have bungled the investigation of alleged Chinese spying at Los Alamos.

As a single member of the Clinton administration and one who is responsive to the public, as open as possible, can you tell us, as far as you know, there was no bungling over the putative Chinese spy?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I want to review everything that we have done. We are setting up a process to review it. The director, the deputy and I all want to make sure that we have looked very carefully at everything; that we are responsive to Congress in every way that we can be, consistent with the ongoing investigation and classified materials.

And I think it is very important that people don't speculate, based on comments that are made relating to classified information that should be considered in the whole context. I just think, in a matter like this, everybody should hear all the facts possible before they jump to conclusions, and then I think they might have other thoughts. At the same time, I want to make sure that we look at everything and see if there is anything that we could have done differently.

Q Who is going to run this inquiry?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We are in the process of setting it up so that it is representative of both the Department of Justice and the FBI.

Q So there will be FBI agents assigned to carry out this review of their own agency?

ATTY GEN. RENO: It is the Department of Justice and the FBI. And I want to stress that it is not just the FBI. I want to look at everything that we did to see if there was anything, either in this administration or in prior administrations, that could have been done differently.

Q So that means you will be reexamining the decisions made by OIPR?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We want to look at everything -- when you say reexamine -- I want to look at the whole process, including decisions made along the way, to see if there was anything that could have been done differently.

Q Ms. Reno, how can you review yourself? How can the Department do this impartially? Isn't this -- should be something for the Inspector General or an outside person, because of the inherent conflicts?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: What I'm considering -- I don't have any allegation that anybody did anything wrong. What I have is a process, a process that is always a very difficult process, and I want to look at it from the point of view of performance to see what we could have done in any way differently.

Q Who would -- what kind of a head would you have for this panel, do you envision?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: There's been a description, and I don't know what the origin of the term is, but people use the term "red team," and -- a team of assistant United States attorneys who have not been involved in the effort, who are career lawyers, who can review it and look at exactly what happened and see if there's anything that could have been done differently.

Q I see, but still, who would head that? An assistant --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: We'll be making appropriate announcements as to staffing.

Q When do you expect the announcements to come?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'd like them to be made as soon as possible.

Q And will the results of their review be made public?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: The results of their review will be made public to the extent that they can, consistent with the information being classified, and I will do everything that I can, consistent with the interest of national security and the

classification of information, to make the information available to Congress and to the public.

Q Ms. Reno, I think that this is an important question. Is this an administrative review, or is it a criminal review --(off mike)?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: It's an -- I don't have any allegations of criminal conduct. I just have people saying this might have been done faster, you might have approved this. Those types of things. And what I want to do is just look at it and

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Administrative is a good description of it.

Q This team, or whatever you want to call it, will not be responsible for any future cases, is that correct?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: This is a team to review what has been done, to see, since questions have been raised, if anything could have been done differently or should have been done differently.

Q How large a team do you envision? How many assistant U.S. attorneys?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would like it to be sufficient to do the job in a prompt, thorough manner.

Q If it's not a criminal review, will the team have the power to recommend administrative action, like firing or changes to any structures or personnel?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What we would do is take their findings and make appropriate judgments. There might be different steps that can be taken, and we'll review it when we get the information and make the appropriate decision.

Q Do you expect them to make recommendations, though?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would think so.

Q Ms. Reno, I have a very basic question. Why are you doing this? Is it your sense that things did not go as they should?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I think there are a lot of people -- so far, I don't know

what other steps could have been taken, but I really do try to respond to questions raised to make sure that we look at it, carefully examine it, say this is what could have been done differently, and make an appropriate explanation of it.

Q Ms. Reno, one story that's been out there that seems very confusing is the extent to which Deputy AG Holder may or may not have dealt with an appeal of the OIPR decision. I'm a little confused about why there should be any ambiguity, because my understanding is all of these decisions were made before he even was sworn in. Why is there confusion on this?

ATTY GEN. RENO: There is confusion in terms, I think, in some people's mind, of time. And I think there's been comment made that there might have been a statement made in passing at a meeting that we had here, and if that be the case, we want to include that and make sure that we fully consider it; that somebody may have asked -- mentioned to me that there was an issue with respect to the FISA. We want to understand everything that is involved.

Q Well, yesterday, I think, in your testimony you said that nobody had ever approached you.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Right. And then after that, I understood that someone had said -- I believe it is John Lewis (sp)-- that the issue was commented on in respect to a more general briefing. And I just want to make sure that we look at the whole process and see just what -- who said what to whom.

Q And you -- are you saying that you do not recall John Lewis (sp) approaching you on the subject?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't have a recollection, but if John Lewis said that he did, then I have a great respect for him.

Q And if I can get back to the question about Mr. Holder, I'm still confused about whether or why he is in or out of the suspicions?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I don't think you should put it as "suspicions." First of all, I think you've got to look at it in the whole context. We can't go into the classified information to explain the whole context. But I think there are -- this was a process that took place over several weeks, perhaps months, and so it may have started without and -- before Mr. Holder got here. And then someone may -- I think where the problem lies is that somebody thought the deputy's office was reviewing it. Who personally reviewed it, I think, again, is the question that

people ask. What I want to make sure of is that there was a complete review, and if there was something that could have been done differently, I want to make sure that we understand that.

Q Well, didn't -- wasn't it you who asked somebody in the Deputy's Office to take another look?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Mr. Lewis understands that that was the case. I don't recall what the circumstances were and how the Deputy's Office came to review it.

Q Ms. Reno, two questions here: Number one, I guess we should assume -- it's fairly obvious, from what you're saying, that until this decision on your part to ask for this review and leaving the Lewis (sp) meeting aside, you had no role in any of this. Is that correct?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, the buck, as I've said before, stops with me. And that's why I want to make sure that we look at everything, understand just what was done, and see what could be done, if anything, to do it differently and better in the future.

Q And the other question is: All of this is against a background of assumption -- at least great concern expressed yesterday on Capitol Hill that a matter of espionage wasn't responded to fast enough. Has anyone ever concluded that there was any espionage?

Regardless of who may have done it, has it ever been concluded that any secrets were actually revealed?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can't comment, because that relates to a pending investigation. But I think those are the questions that should be asked.

Q Does it --

ATTY GEN. RENO: And I think one of the things that we've got to do is, again, look at it -- it goes back to 1982.

We have got to look at what was done since that time; what we can learn, to make sure that we did everything right, that our predecessors did right. And by "right," I mean that "they did it" -- or that "we did it in the best way possible, consistent with the law, to protect national security."

Q Ms. Reno, are there any -- go ahead.

Q Thank you.

One of the things that was mentioned at the Senate Energy Committee hearing yesterday by one of the lab directors, Dr. Browne, is that Mr. Lee had signed a waiver, which allowed the government at any time to search his computers, and that there was some confusion by lab officials that if they went ahead and searched it, it could somehow impede the criminal investigation.

He said there was confusion. Is that of any concern, or is that too --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Here is what is -- this is a very difficult situation to explain. There are others where I could sit here and go back and forth with you and answer the question.

But right now, we have classified information. And so it is very important that it be looked at in the context of the whole. I can't answer the question because it relates to classified information. And so it is just important that we take the whole, that we make appropriate decisions with respect to classified information and what can be said and what can't.

Q Are you suggesting that there is something in that classified information that would exonerate or sort of explain what has happened so far?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think what you can do with the classified information is look at all of it, see exactly what happened, get to the bottom of the issues, consider the allegations made by various people from Congress and otherwise, and just look at it and be responsive and try to answer the questions and get the information out, and see what it says.

Q Ms. Reno, I know you hate "what if"s and you hate stating times, but how urgent a matter is this inquiry? Is this one of those things that is going to go on for a year?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I surely hope not. (Laughter.)

Q I mean, because you are talking about going back to '82. Presumably, that would mean going back through documents, interviewing the people who may have been retired by now; I mean, this sounds like something that could go on for a couple of years?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Whatever we can do, in terms of doing it thoroughly and with

all deliberate speed, we are going to try to do it. But I don't want to cut corners, obviously; I want to focus on our time in office and make sure that we understand, if there was something that could have been done differently, what is it, and how can we address it?

Q Ms. Reno, is part of the review sort of a larger look at the FBI's ability to investigate Chinese espionage? I think they've even admitted that in this area they don't quite understand just how the Chinese may be doing this. I mean, they're very good with Russian espionage, traditional espionage, but with the Chinese ability they seem to be behind.

ATTY. GEN. RENO: The one thing I want to do is try to make sure that we address any concern that anybody has in terms of structure, in terms of organization, in terms of expertise.

Q Permit me to go back to --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I'll always permit you to. But whether I answer it is another question. (Laughter.)

Q I have a feeling you're not going to be able to, but if you can make any comment at all about the knowledge that you have, that this Justice Department has, that secrets -- the information, for that matter -- were secrets that were genuine secrets and they were genuinely transferred. Can you comment on any of those?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: No.

Q Ms. Reno, one other thing that came up in the Senate yesterday was a question about federal enforcement of existing gun laws, and there was a colloquy between you and some of the senators about the fact that, for example, some 6,000 students were expelled or were sent away from school two years ago, in the most recent data, for bringing a gun to school. And you were asked how many federal prosecutions there were and I think you said -- or they said -- there were 10, and that that shows the government isn't enforcing these laws.

You quickly moved on to another subject before I thought you could answer that question. Are you saying that there are additional state prosecutions? Or, do there need to be more federal prosecutions? Or, what's the answer there?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: The answer is that this is a federal concern as well as a local concern; that there are instances where federal laws are needed, in Indian

country and other situations, and where the state law may be inadequate, and it may be appropriate for the federal government to take action. With respect to guns on school grounds and the like, and bringing a gun to school, one of the first issues is, Is it reported to the police, or is the person expelled?

The second issue is, Who is best able to handle a juvenile case if it's a first offender and the child -- if there's any question of detaining the child, it may be better that the child be detained nearby since they will not be in custody for that long. All of these issues have got to be considered.

And it has certainly been the policy of the federal government, from one administration to the next, to make sure that we provide for juvenile detention but we recognize that state and local officials are far better equipped to deal with it and to provide it.

But let me give you some other figures. They spoke yesterday pointing out that, between 1992 and 1996 when most of the decline in federal firearms prosecutions occurred, state prosecutions of weapons offenders increased sharply, more than offsetting the federal decline. Combined federal and state prosecutions for gun crimes have increased since 1992.

Moreover, most of the additional state weapons offenders received prisoner jail sentences. Indeed, the combined number of state and federal weapons offenders sentenced to imprisonment is up almost 25 percent since 1992. And this is during a period that the number of violent crimes committed with firearms dropped 27 percent.

What we are telling people is we want to do what is right for a community. In one community, it may be a situation such as Richmond, and we will pursue that. In another, it may be a more shared responsibility, as in Boston. It is going to be different depending on the state law, depending on the capacity of the prosecutor's office.

But we want to make sure that no one avoids prosecution for the illegal use of guns, after they have been apprehended. And we are committed to that effort.

Q Let's do another bad question.

Many of us who don't follow gun statutes all that carefully, I think, were surprised to learn, in the wake of Littleton, that the penalty for providing a gun to a juvenile -- and this is part of the Gun Control Act of -- 922 of Title XVIII -- is a misdemeanor. There are many felonies in that statute, some with penalties of --

it might be five or 10 years. But providing a handgun or a rifle to a juvenile is a misdemeanor.

Has there been -- in this review of gun laws, has anybody looked at whether -- the penalty should have been increased to a felony for that crime?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me ask Myron to give you whatever review has been done of that issue.

Q Ms. Reno, on the same subject -- (inaudible) -- U.S. vs. Lopez a couple terms ago, in areas outside the commerce of guns, is there much that the federal government can do about the actual possession of guns near a school setting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, what we have got to do is to make sure that where a person possesses the gun and possesses it illegally, or uses it illegally, sells it illegally, anything that is illegal with respect to guns, that we provide for effective prosecution.

Q Ms. Reno, in Colombia last March, during your visit to Colombia, the Colombian government agreed to extradite four drug traffickers to the United States. And we also understand that last week during your visit to Ambassador Moreno and General Serrano here in Washington, this is one of the topics that was touched. Have you seen any positive movement from the Colombian government to grant these extradition requests?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, the process of extradition is in the courts, and I understand that it is moving forward.

Q Ms. Reno, what do you make of the law enforcement in a civil liberties perspective of the decision in Littleton not to allow the friends in the group of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to return to school?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on anything that involves a local matter like that.

Q Can I ask about the Federal Access to Clinic Entrances Act? Has this statute, do you think, especially the criminal sanctions that are contained, has this proven to be effective, and does the statute carry some strong penalties?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to provide you with the specific penalties. I think from my conversations with people in the field, it has had an impact.

Q What is the -- obviously, the statute applies to anyone who tries to block a clinic entrance, but there are other sections of the law that apply to people who provide abortion services, and there are penalties for interfering with them. Why is that an important part of the law?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, if you're going to be -- if you're a part of the process by which a right is ensured, you should be protected as well.

I'd now like to take a few minutes to introduce to you somebody. This is Jennifer Cheslock. And I talked to you last week about what we could do to let the country know the wonderful things that young people are doing. I told you how great they were, in my estimation. They can be obstreperous -- (addressing Miss Cheslock) -- I'm sure you're never obstreperous -- (laughter) -- and they can be witty and creative and wonderful. But there are so many young people doing so many wonderful things in the country.

Jennifer Cheslock represents, I think, the majority of them. She is a senior at Franklin High School in Baltimore, Maryland. She is also the youth chairperson of Baltimore's Youth as Resources. Youth as Resources is a national organization that gives small grants to young people to design and carry out service projects that address problems in their community.

Under Jen's leadership, this program has made great strides to involve young people in improving neighborhoods in Baltimore.

Jen, I'd love for you to tell us about it and give us your thoughts.

JENNIFER CHESLOCK (Student chairperson, Youth as Resources, Baltimore, Maryland): Hi. Baltimore's Youth as Resources was founded about five years ago on the belief that young people can and want to solve community problems. We made grants for youth-designed and - directed community service projects, and youth are put in charge of requesting and evaluating the proposals, making the funding decisions and distributing the grants. That's the part of it that I'm involved with.

Since our inception in 1994, Baltimore's Youth as Resources has completed seven funding cycles, making 68 youth-led community service projects fundable, and serving 4,500 community beneficiaries. The grants are small, at about \$1,300 for an average, but the benefits for the community are enormous. Not only do the community building projects get the funding they need, but young people get real-life training in leadership and community problem solving.

Two examples that -- I think you all have the release or the fax sheet, or maybe not, I don't know -- the two that were on there, one was the Southeast Teen Center that the fiscal agent was the Julie (sp) Community Center in Baltimore. And there were a group of young people that came in and said, "We need something for kids in our area to do after school." And so they came up with a plan to renovate the fifth floor of a private school in their area and made a teen center available to them every day after school, I think from 4:00 to 9:00 or something like that, and then on the weekends, in addition. And that project we funded about two years ago, and it's up and running beautifully.

Another project that we are extremely proud about, that just got started -- well, there are two separate ones -- from Kids on the Hill. These are kids that came from, you know, a very rough area of Baltimore City, and they came to us wanting to use what they were talented in. One kid came and wanted to do a theater class for other kids in his area, and another wanted to teach gymnastics classes. They basically -- this provided them with something to do after school and in addition lets other kids know what -- they're talented and what they can do in the community. I mean, it's really an amazing process -- to be able to observe, at least.

I initially got involved with community service and with Youth as Resources because I wanted to learn more about the lives and challenges of people outside my neighborhood. I wanted to give back to the community the support and encouragement that I had received as a kid.

I met other youth who also had the creativity, energy, and desire to give back to the community. And I want to let you know that I believe in my peers, and we must understand more than you know about what causes some of the tragedies you hear and read about.

More importantly, we want to help. Youth are resources, and given the opportunity, we can offer vital solutions to many of the community problems that we face.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I understand you're a ballplayer, too.

MISS CHESLOCK: Yes. I --

ATTY GEN. RENO: What position do you play?

MISS CHESLOCK: Catcher and first base.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Ah.

Q (Off mike.)

MISS CHESLOCK: Yes, fast-pitch.

Q Jenny, besides looking at lives outside your own neighborhood, was there a particular issue, like youth violence or drug use or something, that attracted you?

MISS CHESLOCK: Well, generally, to this organization, I had heard -- a couple of my friends had gotten involved with it, and I hadn't seen them in a while, so I thought maybe I should go with them to one of the meetings. And I was addicted from then on. It's a good addiction, though.

And they -- it's opened my eyes, expanded my horizons, made me understand that there are so many more troubles than I could have imagined when I was -- I mean, I joined when I was 12 or 13. And so, I mean, it's opened my eyes to so many more things that I wasn't aware of at the time.

Q Like what?

MISS CHESLOCK: Like the different -- like the levels of crime that are going on in the city, the different issues that kids have, that I never had to deal with growing up -- you know, what -- where to walk.

I mean, certain kids can't go a direct route home; they have to, you know, skip different blocks or, you know, take a convoluted route to get home because there are people hanging out on the corners and stuff like that. And it's -- you know, it's heartbreaking to hear these kids talk about it. And they're 8 and 9, and they already know.

Q Tell us --

Q Ms. Cheslock -- oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Q Thanks. Tell us about how you feel personally and how your classmates feel about the terrible tragedy in Littleton.

MISS CHESLOCK: Personally, I feel like it's happening way too much. Just generally, you're -- we're seeing a lot more violence, and kids coming out of their shells, almost, but in a really, really scary way.

My school itself had one of the copycat bomb threats a couple days ago, and some of us were taking it seriously, and some of us weren't understanding why it was happening even in our area. But I think it's, again, we're being -- I live in a suburban area of Baltimore, and we, you know, never could have expected that something like this could happen. It could happen here. It could happen anywhere.

Q Wouldn't you know in your school that something like that was going on -- (off mike)?

MISS CHESLOCK: Personally? I don't know. The kids that these -- the types of kids that seem to be committing these crimes are kids that don't necessarily fit in or aren't going to be the ones that any of us would speak to, or would know -- I mean, we would know of them. Maybe we wouldn't be friends with them. It depends on the situation and the type of kid.

Q Ms. Cheslock, how do you spread the word that these grants are available? And do you have more interest in them than you have money to support them?

MISS CHESLOCK: Well, now -- we recently went through a tremendous funding effort and have raised a lot more money and are capable of funding a lot more proposals than we have been in the past. And so our specific site is now capable of getting -- or funding the numbers of proposals that we had been receiving. Whereas last year we had gotten 15 proposals in and funded about 10, we got over 25 and are looking to interview 22 or 23 next week. So --

Q How many kids participate in your program?

MISS CHESLOCK: On the advisory board, which is the board that makes the funding decisions, there are about 15 young people and about seven adults. So it's -- a youth-adult partnership is very crucial to the whole process. And the young people come from all over the city and the county, for me. And we represent all different kinds of backgrounds and areas.

So, you know, it's -- in the program itself, there are countless numbers. I mean, the community beneficiaries are 4,500, but the numbers of youth I can't honestly tell you.

Q Just one last question. How do your peers respond when you tell them --

MISS CHESLOCK: What I'm doing?

Q Yes.

MISS CHESLOCK: I think a lot of them are, you know, in awe. I mean, not many kids are going to be seen with the Attorney General on any basis ever, so, you know, I had trouble convincing my peers yesterday that I was actually doing this. But I think they all -- every kid wants the opportunity to make a difference. Everyone wants to leave this life making some kind of mark or having their name remembered in some way. And so some get to make it in a more public manner, and some get to make it on a smaller level. And I'm lucky to be able to do it in this kind of a setting and with the help of so many supportive and encouraging adults.

Q What's the minimum age to run for office in Maryland? And when will you be planning -- (interrupted by laughter)?

MISS CHESLOCK: I was joking with my family and with some friends last night that I was going to coin the term "first gentleman." (Laughter.) But, you know, that's a little far in the future. But I think -- I don't know, maybe it's like 21 or something like that? (Laughter.) I haven't considered it yet. I'm trying to get through college.

Q You have the answer down pretty well.

MISS CHESLOCK: Yeah.

Q You managed to answer it without really saying anything -- which is very impressive. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you!

Q Thank you. That's very --

Q Thank you very much.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Can I ask you one question? How do we reach out to those that may be alienated and feel like they're put down? And how can we include them?

Q I think the biggest -- the biggest hardship of getting kids anywhere that feel isolated or alienated from the general population is to be inclusive; incredibly loving and caring. And the kids that, you know, may have the roughest shells on the outside are going to be the ones that need the most caring. And they might

not get it at home, they might not get it from their peers, and so they show it differently on the outside, but once you talk to people, it's amazing the effects that you'll get. You can reach people on a so much more personal level. And I think there are plenty of ways. Youth groups. I mean, personally I'm in a youth group. I'm in B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. It's a national Jewish organization. And we look for the kinds of kids that are very shy, but we believe that we can make leaders out of everyone.

Q And so how are you personally reaching out to the loners, the socially estranged in your school?

MISS CHESLOCK: Okay. For an example; right now, I -- as well as all the activities that I do on a national level, I am very active with my youth group. And what we do basically -- I am in charge of the membership recruitment for my chapter, where -- when I joined, there were 60 girls involved. It is separated between girls and guys. And I am in charge of training about 20 girls to basically take my spot and -- the seniors that will be leaving to go to college, and to keep the kind of really positive activities going throughout the community; and making sure that they can have the same kind of opportunity that I did in such a positive environment.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you all.

(Chorus of thank-yous.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: Just remember, they are pretty wonderful.

Thank you so much, Jennifer.

MISS CHESLOCK: Thank you.

END.