



**U.S. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT MEDIA BRIEFING WITH ATTORNEY
GENERAL JANET RENO**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Good morning.

Q Good morning.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Thank you for your film information.
(Laughter.) Good morning.

Q Good morning to you.

Q I didn't want you to agonize too much.

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yesterday, the United States Senate missed an historic opportunity to make this country safer. Not only did the Senate reject an amendment that would have extended the Brady law to cover gun shows, the Senate actually weakened one of the most effective gun laws we have ever had. The amendment the Senate did pass, the Craig amendment, may be disguised as gun-show legislation, but make no mistake: It will not prevent criminals and children from buying deadly weapons at gun shows. Instead, it will jeopardize our ability to continue the background checks that we currently do.

I am stunned, at less one month after the worst school shooting in our nation's history, the Senate has decided to make it easier for felons, fugitives and other prohibited purchasers to buy guns. We know that guns do not cause violent behavior, but we also know that since we made it harder for criminals and other prohibited persons to get guns, violent gun crime has gone down. Since the passage of the Brady law, over a quarter of million felons, fugitives and other people who should not have guns, have been stopped from buying them. Violent crimes committed with firearms have dropped by 27 percent.

But still, even the Brady law has a loophole that criminals have been exploiting, the gun-show loophole. We want to close this loophole. It allows some merchants at gun shows to sell guns to whomever they choose, without background checks and without consequences if they sell to violent criminals.

The vast majority of Americans favor background checks at gun shows, including organizations involved in gun shows, like the National Alliance of Stocking Gun Dealers. But the NRA and others in the gun lobby are trying to keep this loophole and even make it bigger. The NRA opposed the Brady Law, conjuring up all kinds of fears about how it would be bad for law-abiding gun buyers; but they were wrong. While the law has prevented more than 250,000 felons and others who should not have guns from getting them, law-abiding hunters and sportsmen have not suffered as a result.

The American people know that if we're serious about reducing gun violence and stopping children and criminals from gaining access to deadly weapons, we must enact common-sense gun laws like those contained in the president's legislation.

We have been successful with what we have done. We must not take backward steps. We must move forward.

Q Ms. Reno, the gun show loophole seemed like the easiest to pass of everything that the administration has been talking about. If you can't even get this through the

Senate, is there any hope for any gun legislation?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important for all America to be heard, not just some, and for all America to be heard expressing what so many people express to me: Why can't we just have common-sense laws that protect ourselves and do not limit the lawful use of weapons?

Q It was just two or three days ago that you were at the White House with the president when he was applauding the increasing cooperation with the gun industry, and particularly the gun makers. Did you or did the administration not see this defeat coming?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important that we not focus on what's happened but move forward and address the issue and get the law passed. I think if people speak out -- as Congresswoman McCarthy said about a week ago, it's time for all of us to speak out and just say, "Look, we shouldn't sell guns to people who cannot lawfully possess them; we shouldn't put guns in the hands of children who don't know how to use them and aren't supervised." We should get to start talking about how we do it just based on common sense and what's right. And you just don't put guns in the hands of people that shouldn't have them.

Q So what's next at this point? Do you continue to lobby as hard as you can? Are you going to take a look at the entire package and --

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're going to continue to work with everybody concerned to get the right law passed.

Q Ms. Reno, have you considered going to the country, barnstorming the country, and telling groups of people what you have just told us, in an attempt to put pressure on Congress to take some meaningful step?

ATTY GEN. RENO: That might not be a bad idea.

Q Obviously, you hadn't considered it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Well, I don't like "barnstorming" as a word. That makes it sound like -- but I think it is important that we all come together and speak out.

Q This was an amendment attached to an overall youth-violence bill. What do you think of the rest of the package that is pending now in the Senate?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important that we work with everybody concerned to get a bill that is balanced, but I think it is important that we look to the larger issues.

You can't solve juvenile justice issues just on juvenile justice terms. We need to address the issue of more policemen, as the president has called for yesterday in his Crime bill for the 21st century. We need to address the police departments' and the sheriffs offices' needs for more technology, for technology that can help them match wits with dangerous criminals. We have got to interrupt on a more consistent permanent basis, the cycle of drug abuse through intervention, enforcement and after care and follow-up in treatment. All of these issues have got to be addressed in comprehensive crime legislation.

But most of all, I think from what we have seen, we have got to do everything we can to prevent youth violence. We don't want to see children dead; we don't want to see children kill others. We have got to try to do everything we can to provide the programs in the communities that can prevent school violence and violence --

Q Is that bill that is pending now doing that in your view?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think we are beginning to -- if we work together, I think we can come up with solid legislation.

Q Ms. Reno, Senator Shelby yesterday had some fairly strong remarks concerning the handling of the Chinese espionage case. And one of the questions that he suggested was whether your office, or you directly, should have been more involved in the decision-making process concerning the wiretap issue. In hindsight, do you have any second

thoughts about how it has been handled, or at this point?

ATTY GEN. RENO: What I have tried to do is on all of these issues, not with respect to just this one, is establish a process where everyone knows that, if people disagree -- come to me and let's work it out.

Mr. Lewis mentioned to me in passing that he had a problem. I asked that it be checked out and reviewed again. And we're going to continue to try to do that and institutionalize it so that not only do I ask people to, if they disagree, to come forward, but to direct that it be done.

Q It's interesting that you didn't even remember that Mr. Lewis had come to you, so obviously, the way that he raised it did not trigger any major concern in your mind or did not start any kind of --

ATTY GEN. RENO: He raised it in the context of what I had -- the plan that I had laid down with Mr. Lewis, with the other assistant directors, the deputy director and Director Freeh; instead of people of fussing about things, let me know if you have a problem and we'll have somebody review it again to make sure that we've done the right thing, and if you continue to have problems, then we'll continue to look at it and see what can be done and work it out. Now what I want to do is just make sure that people are directed to bring it to me if there's disagreement.

Q Senator Shelby said that the way you had handled this matter of the FISA warrant on this -- (inaudible) -- case was indefensible. It's clear, whether it's indefensible or not, currently the way the department, including the FBI, handled it is going undefended. Isn't there something you can say that will explain to the public why the department, including the FBI, handled the request for the warrant the way it did?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think I can explain it this way. When you have classified information, which is secret information because it affects national security, you don't discuss it,

and so I can't discuss the details. But I can say that when government asks for the authority to intercept electronic surveillances, to intercept conversations between people where they anticipate that their conversations will be private, all America wants to make sure that when government does that, they do it the right way, according to the law and to the Constitution. We have tried to do that in every way possible, and were going to continue to try to do that for as long as I am attorney general. I think that's what was done in this situation.

Q Ms. Reno, there's been a lot of speculation about what actually happened. I know that the investigation is far from over.

But you can say -- can you say at this point whether you see any evidence of Chinese penetration at Los Alamos or Livermore or Sandia? Has anything crossed your desk that lets you believe that something actually occurred?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Again, I can't -- I am one of those who is not going to discuss classified information. And I long for the day when I can sit down and say, "This is what happened, this is why it happened, and these are steps that we are taking."

Q Can you tell us anything about your review panel? Have you -- I have heard a number of people talk about a guy who might be the head of it -- have you determined who that is going to be? Have you chosen the other members of the panel? Do you know what their agenda is going to be?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Their agenda is going to be the review of the whole process and to make sure that we have all the information concerning the process. The review team should be constituted, I think, by the end of this week.

Q And you'll make an announcement of his -- on it?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know what -- how we will handle that.

Q It just occurred about something you said a moment ago. You began discussing the need to protect constitutional rights.

You said that that's what you think was done in this situation.

Does that mean you think that the situation was handled properly as far as the search warrant, or in hindsight do you wish that that had been done differently?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I won't comment on the --

Q (Inaudible) -- what was done in this situation --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I can describe the process; I won't describe -- I don't think -- if I get into discussion of the decision, I think I open the door to the issue of classified information.

Q Ms. Reno, would you tell us how often FISA requests are denied?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Let me ask Myron to check with the Office of Intelligence Policy Review to see what we can say and can't say based on classified information -- the fact that much of the information is classified. But we will try to be as forthcoming as we can, consistent with the requirements of confidentiality.

Q Ms. Reno -- what are the standards for seeking electronic surveillance?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to give you a copy of the statute so I don't comment in any way that would affect the pending matter.

Q Ms. Reno, in Riverside, California, where my newspaper is based, the district attorney failed to charge four police officers who killed a black teenager, leaving it to the Department of Justice to pursue possible civil rights violation charges.

Does that put any pressure on your department to act in a particular way?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have tried for as long as I have been involved in the role of prosecutor to make sure that nobody ever puts pressure on me to decide what to do in an investigation. If people try to put pressure, I react the other way. And so I just take the case, try to get as much of the facts as I can, and ensure a process in the department that does that, and then I expect the lawyers in the department to make the best decision they can based on the facts and the law.

Q How closely are you following that case?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Closely.

Q Why is that important to you?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Because we're involved in the whole issue of police trust and police confidence, and I've addressed that in a speech at the National Press Club trying to point out that most police officers do a great job for their community and for their nation. They put their life on the line. They try to do so much for their community. They make such a difference. There are some situations where that doesn't happen, and we've got to make sure that the processes of the Department of Justice are geared to address those.

Q The Civil Rights Division began looking into this specific incident at the beginning of this year, right after it happened. Do you have any indication that there's been any significant progress in that investigation or that it's --

ATTY GEN. RENO: I would not comment on the progress of the investigation.

Q Ms. Reno, I know you said you didn't want to get into the specifics of this espionage case, but you did say, though,

that you thought that everything was done according to -- at least according to the limits that you wanted to abide by. I mean, is that a defense of how the department acted in this case, or not?

ATTY GEN. RENO: You can take it for whatever you -- in whatever fashion you want.

Q Can you give us any update on the department's review of that matter, understanding it's still pending, but even --

ATTY GEN. RENO: Beverly just asked about it, and the team should be constituted really by tomorrow, I hope.

Q Ms. Reno, on the subject of abortion violence; last week, Mr. James Kopp was, I think, wanted for questioning in the murder of Dr. Slepian. And we still have Eric Rudolph who is apparently not in the area where he is being looked for -- two fringe radicals, it appears, that give the pro-life movement a pretty bad -- a bad reputation or a black eye.

Ma'am, what can you say about Mr. Kopp or Mr. Rudolph for that matter?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to give you the information with respect to Kopp and the charges that are currently pending against him. With respect to both men, we are going to try to do everything we can to see that justice is done.

Q Ms. Reno, on alleged Chinese spying, the rhetoric on Capitol Hill has been very strident. Is there some danger that the politics or the political dynamics of this issue might cloud what really happened or at least in the public's mind?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it is important, and it is always difficult, in any setting but particularly in the setting involving such significant issues, that people will not get all the facts, particularly where it relates to classified information. It is important that, as we go along and as we are able to speak about these matters, we do so on the

fullest and most complete terms possible. But it is extremely important, when you consider what is at stake here, that it be done the right way, according to law, and with the best interests of the United States at heart.

Q Mr. Wen Ho Lee has been tried and convicted in many speeches that have been made recently. One particularly harsh speech by a Republican presidential candidate confused Mr. Lee with Bill Lann Lee. Is the rhetoric getting away from us on this one? As far as I know, Mr. Lee hasn't been charged with anything.

ATTY GEN. RENO: That is correct.

Q Can you see any reason to increase the law enforcement surveillance, of the FBI especially, in this country to counter counterespionage that may be coming from the PRC or may not?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I have told Mr. Freeh that on issues with respect to national security -- and I know that he agrees with me -- this is one of our highest priorities, and we're going to make sure that we've got the resources necessary to address it.

Q Ms. Reno, on the issue of guns and gun shows, if background checks are required in gun stores, can you understand the logic for why they wouldn't be required at a gun show, which is also sort of a commercial setting?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Why would they not?

Q Right. Do you understand the logic of why people don't want it done?

ATTY GEN. RENO: No. I don't think most Americans do, either.

Q Ms. Reno, there has been discussion about sending FBI agents to conduct interrogations of the Kosovar refugees to gather evidence of possible war crimes. Frankly, I've been unable to get a straight answer out of anybody in this

building or across the street about whether this is actually going forward. I hear specifics about numbers of agents from particular field offices, and then I hear from somebody else, "Oh, it's not even clear that we're going, we don't have the money to pay for it."

Can you straighten us out at all?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're trying to work through it and make sure it's all straightened out.

Q But what does that mean? Are agents going to be investigating crimes committed against non-Americans by non-Americans?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We just want to work with the State Department, work with other agencies involved to do whatever we can to support the initiatives as long as we have authority. We want to do it in a sensitive, careful way if we're called upon to do it, and we want to make sure we can pay for it.

Q And what is the authority?

ATTY GEN. RENO: We're working through all of those issues.

Q What is the immigration status of the refugees from Kosovo? I'll leave it at that.

ATTY GEN. RENO: I will ask Myron to give you the precise status because I think it -- I want to make sure that I'm as accurate as possible, so I'll ask him to follow through.

Q Let me see if I can read between the lines. Is your answer to Beverly -- are you saying that the Justice Department and the FBI have no objection to participating in this Kosovo war crimes investigation if the jurisdiction questions can be resolved?

Is that --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Okay, I think there are a number of issues

that have got to be addressed, and we're in the process of addressing them. That's not the only issue, but there are a number and I think, as I work through these with other agencies, it's best to do that first.

Q Ms. Reno, coming back to police brutality, do you favor withholding funds from your department to police departments that have a history or a record of police brutality?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: It would depend on the circumstances.

Q So there's no way to try to come up with a way of dealing with that, or --

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Again, it depends on the circumstances. It depends on what has happened. It's difficult to answer those questions in a general sense.

Q Under what circumstances would it be warranted?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Don't do what-ifs. (Laughter.)

Q Ms. Reno, you were out in Colorado recently and I'm just curious about your own reaction to the Senate yesterday killing this bill that would have closed the loophole at gun shows. What's your reaction when a bill like that goes down? What are you feeling about the NRA these days?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: Well, I think my reaction was the way I described it in my opening statement: I was stunned.

Q And on the NRA?

ATTY. GEN. RENO: I've always thought that there were kind of two prongs to the NRA. There's the camel's-nose-in-the-tent prong that says you don't do any regulations because if you do any, the camel takes over the tent.

Well, I think we should put a halter on the camel and tell the camel just to relax for a while. (Laughter.)

There's another prong of the NRA that I think agrees with most Americans. If you don't know how to use a gun, if you've never fired one before, if you've never reviewed the laws about what you can do with a gun or can't do with a gun, you shouldn't have one. And I would just hope that both branches of the NRA would sit down and figure out how we come up with common sense regulations.

All of our laws have to be balanced. You don't yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater, but you have freedom of speech. There are balancing issues with respect to freedom of religion.

There are so many issues that have got to be balanced in a thoughtful, careful way, and now I think the time has come in this country. Just think about it for a moment. I've gone over this with you before. But in a five-year period in the '90s in Chicago, there were over 3,000 gun homicides. In Toronto, a city of similar size, there were 100. Gun homicides, gun violence, does not have to occur in this country.

Now, let me be an advocate -- be a devil's advocate, for a moment -- for the NRA. They and some senators say, "But you're not prosecuting enough gun cases." The number of small gun cases you prosecute isn't going to make the difference. It's how the federal government works with state and local government to focus on who should handle which gun case, who handles it in the best interest of the community and the nation, who can get the most appropriate sentences, who has the most appropriate correctional system, such as juvenile justice systems, to handle juveniles who might be involved. And in that effort, we, I think, have made progress. High-level federal firearms offenders, those sentenced to five years or more, are up nearly 30 percent since 1992, from 1,049 to 1,345.

In other words, we're getting stiffer sentences, and combined federal and state convictions are up dramatically. In 1997, nearly 25 percent more criminals were convicted on state and federal weapons offenses than in 1992. It's common sense. It's not numbers, it's not who gets the credit, it's how we work together to get the job done in

the best interest of all concerned.

And I think we should all join together -- the camel side of the NRA, the other side of the NRA, manufacturers, citizens, young people. I think if we come together and we talk in common sense terms, we can make some really remarkable steps forward in permitting sportsmen to use guns the right way and in making sure those who don't belong to have them don't get them.

Q Do you, yourself, have firearms? Have you used guns?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I've used guns. My mother taught me to shoot a .22 when I was little, and I got to be good at it. But I don't have a gun.

Q Ms. Reno, on the issue of coming together, in your tenure as attorney general, how often, or has the NRA ever initiated dialogue with you, and vice-versa?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I don't know whether they've initiated dialogue with me. I'm always happy to have a dialogue if somebody wants to figure out what we can do together.

Q If there wasn't the will to pass legislation to your satisfaction in the wake of Columbine, what will it take? You talk about working together at this point, but if that will wasn't there after this tragedy, what has to happen?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I think it's important for the American people to speak out, to let their voice be heard. There are some -- I think, again, Congresswoman McCarthy said it best. We've seen examples -- I believe it was her -- pointing out what Mothers Against Drunk Drivers have done speaking out. They're eloquent, eloquent forces for change in this country.

People are beginning to speak out about domestic violence. When I came to Washington, it was a subject that people still didn't talk about, but now, both in the criminal justice system and in the medical community, we're talking about how family physicians talk with their patients about

domestic violence and counsel them before the problem even arises as to what to do.

There is a recognition that we should not accept it; it does not have to be accepted. It's because people spoke out. It's because victims were heard. All of us have got to speak out.

Thank you.

Q Thank you very much.

Q Ms. Reno, what are you doing for your health these days?

ATTY GEN. RENO: I'm going to try to go canoeing.

Q Are you walking?

ATTY GEN. RENO: Yes, I'm walking. And then I am, hopefully, going home for a weekend -- (inaudible).

Q (Off mike.)

ATTY GEN. RENO: That's always very good for your health.

END.